

Winter 24

Washington Trails

A Publication of Washington Trails Association • wta.org

Embracing joy

How getting outside can help you thrive in the winter

**From curious camp
kid to respected
outdoor leader**

**A year exploring
211 miles of
Mount Rainier**

**Want to play in
the snow? Tips for
picking snowshoes**

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The Restorative Power of Time Outdoors

It's that time of year when the weather shifts, days shorten and every opportunity to get outside feels precious. Lately, I've been thinking a lot about the restorative power of time outdoors. When life gets hectic, or the world feels overwhelming, I find it's helpful to remember the many ways nature can help us improve our overall well-being.

At WTA, we talk frequently about the benefits of time outdoors. We believe that spending time outdoors is good for our hearts, minds and bodies. We want to make sure everyone has access to those benefits for generations to come.

I recently met with Howard Frumkin, a professor at the University of Washington, who leads the Land and People Lab at the Trust for Public Land. He spoke about his team's research, which shows that access to green spaces and trails is clearly linked to improvements in physical fitness, reductions in chronic conditions such as high blood pressure and longer lifespans. Research also shows that time in nature reduces stress, relieves symptoms of anxiety and depression, and boosts cognition and sleep quality.

As a parent, I see these positive impacts firsthand every time I take my children to a local park or trail. The immediate benefits of time outdoors are clear: Bad moods (including mine) tend to evaporate as we explore our surroundings — and laughter and wonder soon follow. The longer-term benefits are just as clear. After a day — or even just an hour or two — outdoors, my kids are calmer (and even if they're not, I am) during dinner. They're easier to put to bed and often sleep better.

As we enter the winter months, I hope everyone is able to keep getting outside and connecting with the healing powers of nature. Those benefits are powerful and worth protecting. And they are one of the things that brings us together as an outdoor community.

Happy hiking,

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





24

It takes a community

From trails to the state capitol, WTA's volunteers help us get more done

Features

6 Sharpening skills

Crosscut saws demand skill and patience to use and maintain. Crystal Hudelson is up for the challenge, and she's creating community along the way.

14 Partnership in the Pasayten

With trails falling off the map in the Pasayten, a groundbreaking group of women (and their horses) teamed up to clear the way in an area heavily impacted by wildfires.

16 Portrait of a leader

From a curious camp kid to an outdoor professional earning statewide accolades, Angelic Friday brings her joy for the outdoors everywhere she goes.



On the cover

Dorian Heller, dorianheller.com, captured this photo of the Milky Way from the Fremont fire lookout. The trip was on a whim, but he was thrilled with the results.



42

Explore in the snow

Snowshoes can help you explore the wonders of winter. Here's what you need to know to pick a pair that's right for you.

Photos by Mikki Boughton, Melissa Perez

Departments

3 Front Desk

Greetings from our chief executive officer and magazine editor.

6 Community

A love for the art of the crosscut saw helped build community in the outdoors.

11 Trail Talk

Honoring 35 years of dedicated volunteer work. A BCRT for women and horses.

36 Trail Mix

Fighting hiking burnout. How to look for wildlife signs in winter.

44 Hike It

Find inspiration for your next hike.

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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Making Space for Joy

Over the summer, I was so happy to enjoy one of the great perks of working at Washington Trails Association. I took a sabbatical and enjoyed a rejuvenating break from work. I went hiking, camping and backpacking. I swam in a lot of lakes and explored Mount St. Helens. I also read a lot in the hammock I bought specifically for my sabbatical.

In August, I came home from a trip to find the latest issue of Washington Trails magazine

waiting for me. It was so fun to see the final product in my mailbox. I'm so thankful for all my coworkers who covered for me and made it possible to have that time. I missed them while I was gone!

In September, I came back to work and immediately jumped into this magazine. I've loved working on it, especially with this issue's focus on the joys of spending time outside. We say it all the time, but at WTA we really believe in the value of trails for everyone, forever because they bring so much joy to people's lives, providing a place to take care of our mental and physical health, and everyone deserves that.

In this issue, we have stories celebrating the people who keep hikers informed and trails accessible, including our many amazing volunteers (page 24). We also have some tips on what to do if you're starting to feel a bit burnt out on hiking (page 36), as well as some ideas to make your winter hiking even more fun (page 40). And we have two stories about WTA staff, and how they're finding joy in the outdoors, both in their personal (page 20) and professional lives (page 16).

Thank you for being part of our community! And I hope you are able to find joy in the outdoors this winter.

Jessi Loerch | Washington Trails editor | jessi@wta.org



Cutting Teeth on the Crosscut

Tool and trail maintenance helped Crystal Hudelson foster joy in the outdoors

By Joseph Gonzalez



Crosscut saws are a perfect tool for clearing downed trees. However, learning how to use a crosscut is tricky, and refurbishing and maintaining one is even trickier. But for climber, volunteer and BIPOC outdoor community leader Crystal Hudelson, the crosscut isn't just good for clearing logs — it's a tether to the climbing and hiking communities, and the outdoors itself.

Crystal's been climbing for more than 10 years. But her joy isn't just in complex route sequences and gnarly crimps; it's in community. Sharing this joy is what led her to sit on the board of a Seattle BIPOC nonprofit and to develop their rock-climbing program. And it's what got her involved with WTA.

WTA proudly hosts a crosscut saw demonstration every year at the Refuge Outdoor Festival, a 3-day outdoor recreation experience geared toward people of color. Crystal was immediately drawn to the crosscut when attending the festival in 2022. With the guidance of WTA trails staff Jay Tarife and Zachary Toliver, she had her first crosscut saw experience and was hooked. A passion that began as a few saw strokes and sawdust has blossomed into a full-on crosscut hobby.

This page: From cutting her first log cookie to helping to restore a popular climbing crag, Crystal's crosscut saw journey has had a powerful sense of community.

Facing page: To earn the rank of A level sawyer, Crystal did extensive training — both in planning the cuts and in wielding the saw.

Building skills with WTA

In March, WTA hosted its annual BIPOC crosscut training with our Emerging Leaders Program. Crystal joined the action alongside other community partners to earn her A level sawyer certification. With this certification, Crystal can operate a crosscut saw under supervision of B and C level sawyers, like Jay or the other instructors. The training included one day of Forest Service sawyer curriculum, followed by a few days to practice different saw and ax techniques, and culminated in an exam. The exam included finding a log, developing a cut plan and successfully carrying out the plan while showing a nuanced understanding of safety procedures.

“There’s something so meditative about using a crosscut. It’s a gentle way of engaging with trail maintenance. Unlike a chainsaw, you can still stop and hear the birds singing. I like quiet in nature,” Crystal said.

She didn’t just earn her A level sawyer certification. Day one of the BIPOC crosscut training was also Crystal’s fifth day volunteering with WTA, earning her her own WTA green hat. And later in the spring, Crystal joined WTA’s Crew Leader College to learn the basics of trail construction and maintenance.

She learned. She felt. She saw(ed).

Intrigued by tools and entering her third season of crosscut sawing with WTA, Crystal acquired an old, rusty saw to maintain herself. Soon after, she enrolled in the Pacific Crest Trail Association’s first-ever Pacific Northwest crosscut saw maintenance training to learn how to properly care for the tool.

Her new saw was badly in need of work, and the following weeks were spent taking the skills from her recent training and applying them to her own personal saw rehabilitation project: sharpening and setting the saw’s teeth and straightening its blade to ensure



it would cut smoothly through logs. Crystal was able to practice her saw skills with her personal tool during WTA’s trainings.

“A tool is only as effective as its user’s technique. I’m still a fairly new buckner, so when I tested out my newly sharpened saw, I didn’t get the perfect result. It’s a learning process, and after the next sharpening, it’ll be even better,” Crystal said.

As an outdoor leader committed to providing recreation opportunities to all, she had a project in mind: Gritscone crag.

How Gritscone crag got its groove back

Gritscone is a climbing crag in the Snoqualmie corridor. It’s known as a beginner-friendly area for new climbers. But its popularity resulted in erosion, exposing tree roots and putting trees at risk of being dislodged entirely. It was a hazard and put climbers in potential danger.

Plans to rehabilitate the area began in 2021 between WTA, the Washington Department ▶

The craft of crosscut care

Crosscut saws are notoriously challenging to maintain. Most have two types of teeth, each with their own purpose. Cutter teeth cut wood; raker teeth loosen the cut fiber and dislodge it. Crosscut saws need to be hand sharpened, because the teeth need to be at perfect lengths and angles to complement each other.



◀ **Crystal earns her green hat** with hype from WTA staff Angelic Friday, Zachary Toliver and Jay Tarife.



There's something so meditative about using a crosscut. It's a gentle way of engaging with trail maintenance. ... You can still stop and hear the birds singing. I like quiet in nature.



This is Crystal Hudelson's personal crosscut, which she restored herself.

of Natural Resources and other community partners, including Washington Climbers Coalition. It wasn't long before Crystal heard about it. As a climber and community leader who instructed at the crag and had seen the impact firsthand, Crystal knew she could help. So she started conversations with WTA to mobilize trail maintenance volunteers — hikers and climbers alike.

Last spring, Crystal helped coordinate volunteers from a local BIPOC nonprofit and connected them with WTA's Lost Trails Found crews and other partners. Under the guidance of Jay and Zachary, and with contributions from Angelic Friday, BIPOC volunteer trail crews cleared fallen trees at the base of the crag and developed a trail to access the top of the climbing routes, providing a formal path for climbers to install top ropes.

The Washington Conservation Corps and Washington Department of Natural Resources also provided

support. Both organizations helped coordinate the project, and DNR was even able to fly in building materials, like rock and timber.

WTA's paid Lost Trails Found crews installed belay platforms under the climbing routes. Creating these flat areas helps prevent erosion and gives climbers space to belay and rest. The combined efforts of many helped prevent environmental degradation and provide a better climbing experience.

Climbing to new community highs

Just like the sway of a saw, caring for trails can be a cyclical process.

“This entire journey has come full circle for me. I started crosscutting out in the field during our Gritscore crag maintenance days in 2022. Back then, Jay expressed that he'd allow me to expand on my crosscut skills even more the next time we worked together on a project. As the projects advanced, so did my crosscut skills.”

Just as Crystal has learned more about the crosscut, she's also grown as a leader in the outdoor community. She's now on the board of directors for the Washington Climbers Coalition and is excited to continue to empower hikers and climbers to care for the green spaces they love. ■

Follow Crystal's outdoor journey on Instagram at [@aroseontherock](#). Check out her highlights for her saw work.

WTA's Emerging Leaders Program offers technical and leadership skills for early career trail work professionals. Learn more about the program at [wta.org/elp](#).



LEARN • LEAD • INSPIRE



Trip leaders have led over 1,000 trips. You can lead one, too.

Learn to plan outdoor trips for your students and community to become part of the next generation of outdoor leaders. Outdoor Leadership Training workshops equip you with practical skills to lead outdoor trips while ensuring every participant has a fun and safe experience. Workshops are for educators and community leaders who work with youth. Register now for 2025 workshops and start planning your first great adventure.

SNOWSHOEING

February 22 — Snoqualmie Pass

HIKING

April 12 — Point Defiance, Tacoma

October 18 — Tolt-MacDonald Park, Carnation

CAMPING

June 14 — Dash Point State Park, Federal Way

BACKPACKING

July 18–20 — Olympic National Park

Learn more and sign up at wta.org/olt.



Share a story

Memorable moments from WTA's online community



I started hiking more consistently after COVID-19 started in 2020. Often, I went solo or with my oldest son. I read trip reports to get familiarized with the hikes. Then I decided to write my own trip reports on various platforms. I also found that WTA trip reports tend to be more thorough, and I started submitting more detailed trip reports on WTA in 2022 with links to photos and even GPS tracks.

I enjoy spending time on trails to disconnect from daily life and to “find myself” again. I do not know how nature works in its own mysterious way to heal a person. After I finish a hike, I come home tired, dirty, but 100 times happier!

Initially, I only took “summit pictures” as “proof” that I was on top of the mountain. Over the years, I began to appreciate my hiking journey. I take frequent breaks to admire the beauty of the trails and capture it through photography. Looking at the photos, I have realized that the journey is equally as beautiful as the destination!

I love spontaneous and quick shots. Sometimes I only have a few seconds to capture a beautiful mountain before a marine layer rolls in or cute pikas before they run away. Weather in the mountains changes quickly too. Many times, I’ve taken pictures of the mountain with a

beautiful cloud inversion that came and went within minutes.

I took this photo on a hike to Tatoosh Peak. This year I set a goal to hike and scramble 10 out of 100 peaks at Mount Rainier. My initial plan was to scramble Echo and Observation rocks, but due to limited time, I decided to go for a more straightforward hike to Tatoosh Peak. Turns out I had the summit to myself, along with a beautiful view of Rainier and a turquoise tarn. I also still completed my goal for the day!

— **Rizka Budiati-Szkutnik**,
@rizkapb on Instagram

Join us online!



Highlights

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

Thank You, Jim, for 35 Years of Copy Editing!

Back in 1989, Jim Cavin hiked to Mount Persis. On the way back from the snowy trip, he and his group dropped off the ridge too soon. They weren't lost — they could see the road — but they definitely didn't take the easiest route.

After the trip, Jim wrote up his first trip report for what was then called Signpost, WTA's magazine. He worked downtown, near WTA's office, so he went in to drop off his trip report. There, posted on the wall was the latest issue of Signpost with a blue pencil and a sign that said, "Don't just stand there, proofread."

So Jim proofread.

And he kept doing it — for 35 years — as the name of the magazine changed, as editors came and went, and as WTA grew dramatically. After many, many years of volunteering, Jim is now enjoying a well-earned retirement from fact-checking trail names, correcting typos and clarifying confusing sentences. His last issue was in August.

Jim admits that, at first, his volunteering wasn't entirely altruistic. At the time, all trip reports were shared via the print magazine, which means there was a delay. By proofreading, he saw trip reports early.

In his years with WTA, Jim has seen big changes. When he started, the entire WTA staff, except for one person, worked on Signpost. Now, while the magazine is still a vital part of our work, WTA is much larger and the magazine staff is dwarfed by the rest of the organization. Jim hasn't proofread trip reports recently — those went fully digital in the mid-90's — but he's read pretty much everything else.

Through the years, Jim has seen WTA stories shift while core values stayed the same. WTA started as a way for hikers to communicate and has grown to include advocacy, trail maintenance and equity work.

Share Tips for Responsible Hiking

Wow! Larch marching was extra popular this year. WTA ambassadors were out at Esmeralda Basin and Heather-Maple Pass Loop to help educate hikers on proper trail etiquette, but we can't do this work alone. You can help by sharing our Trail Smarts info, wta.org/trailsmarts, with your communities. You can also find alternatives to extremely popular trails in our Hiking Guide, wta.org/hikingguide.



▲ Jim Cavin has been a dedicated volunteer for Washington Trails magazine for more than three decades.

As an editor, Jim has a knack for finding sneaky errors that other folks may miss. And he has fun with it.

"Jim has an easy laugh, a sly smile and a permanent twinkle in his eye. It was fun to get his proofreading notes back, because he'd inevitably find ways to infuse his copy edits with little jokes or wry critiques designed to make me smile," said Lace Thornberg, former Washington Trails editor.

Jim says he's always worked to ensure accuracy of the magazine, while allowing for personality of each writer.

"I will fix typos or spelling errors, but I like to let the author have their own voice," Jim said.

Jim will keep reading the magazine and following along with the adventures of WTA and the broader trail community.

We wish him all the best and thank him for decades of work!

Are You Ready for Winter?

Every season is hiking season, but in winter there are extra variables to consider. Check wta.org/winter for safety tips and suggestions for winter hikes. And you can use the snow-depth layer on our Hike Finder Map to help you plan your trips.

NOTEWORTHY

Photo courtesy Jim Cavin



After outreach at Heather-Maple Pass, WTA ambassadors Nomi Fuchs, Jenn Seva and Skye Guidotti hiked and ran into Forest Service wilderness ranger Michael Sawiel.

Spreading the Joy of Hiking

How WTA ambassadors helped hikers across the state this year

By Nicole Masih-Theberge

In 2024, WTA ambassadors supported more than 70 events across the state. Volunteers answered questions about Leave No Trace principles, awarded WTA logo stickers to kids guessing how many national parks are in Washington and demonstrated the proper use of a Pulaski. WTA's dedicated ambassadors spread the joy of hiking in three main ways: connection, awareness and education.

Connection

Our main goal at any event is to foster connection and support our work to ensure a future where there are trails for everyone. Ambassadors attend events focused on a wide range of outdoor communities. In 2024, events our ambassadors attended included Refuge Outdoor Festival,

which is geared towards BIPOC folks and allies; the Chuckanut 50k, for trail runners; and the Back Country Horsemen Rendezvous, for horse enthusiasts. WTA events, such as Trails and Ales and Hike the State, also help bring new people into our community. This year, we had Trails and Ales events in Bellingham, Vancouver, Spokane, Cle Elum and Seattle.

Awareness

WTA has so many resources that can help hikers — but only if those hikers know about them! Ambassadors attended large community events like Pacific Crest Trails Days, Spokane-area Valley Fest and Issaquah Salmon Days to spread the word about WTA. Often, folks know about WTA for two main reasons: our trail work and our Hiking Guide. Ambassadors help hikers learn more, such as about our advocacy work or how to sign up to volunteer. Ambassadors talk to folks, find out their interests and then let them know how WTA can help.

Education

Providing opportunities for trail users to take better care of themselves, other humans and the land and wildlife when they recreate is vital to our mission. Our ambassadors spend time where hikers are — at trailheads — and work to provide a welcoming space. They answer questions and provide a gentle education on topics such as Leave No Trace and the Ten Essentials. In 2024, ambassadors worked at 13 trailheads and spoke with approximately 3,200 recreators.

In the coming year, WTA ambassadors will continue to share the joy of hiking. If you'd like to be part of the fun, make sure you're signed up for WTA newsletters, wta.org/trailnews, to hear about upcoming events.



A Honda Passport TrailSport, named **Oyster Dome**, helped get gear to the trailhead for work at Ptarmigan Ridge.

Helping WTA Help Hikers

Presented by your Western Washington Honda Dealers

One of the special things about WTA's vision of **Trails for Everyone, Forever**, is that it brings together hikers, land managers, advocates and outdoor enthusiasts of all kinds. This work is also valued by companies who want to have a positive impact on their local community, like WTA's partners at Western Washington Honda Dealers.

WTA has worked with Western Washington Honda Dealers since 2023 to maintain trails and provide hiking information for all. Western Washington Honda Dealers came to WTA with a desire to continue to live the values of the dealers' Drive Good philosophy, which was born out of their nearly 50-year connection to the Western Washington region.

To help WTA get work done for trails, Western Washington Honda Dealers generously donated

three vehicles. WTA immediately put the two Honda Ridgelines and the Honda Passport TrailSport to work, naming them after three iconic trails we've worked on: Oyster Dome, Pratt River and Wallace Falls.

These vehicles have traveled over 15,000 miles across the state to take staff, volunteers and all the tools they need to trailheads. Wallace (lovingly nicknamed "Wally" by staff) is also used by our Outdoor Leadership Training program to haul gear to events that teach educators and community leaders how to help people get outside safely. This program hosts hiking, backpacking and snowshoeing workshops.

Through this partnership, Western Washington Honda Dealers has also helped introduce more people to WTA's essential hiking tools and resources. Each time someone purchases or leases a new Honda from any of the 18 Western Washington Honda Dealers, they receive a complimentary WTA membership. Through this program, 1,500 people have become part of the WTA member community, which allows them to get involved with virtual events and receive the very magazine you are reading.

Western Washington Honda Dealers' philanthropic support extends to providing matching gifts for WTA to use during fundraising campaigns, doubling members' support of trails. They have also provided support for WTA events, including WTA's concert collaboration with the Northwest Symphony Orchestra in April and Hike-a-Thon in August. WTA is grateful to Western Washington Honda Dealers for being true partners in driving WTA's work forward.

Photo by Scott Kranz

12 Women and 4 Horses Fix a Trail

WTA and Back Country Horsemen of Washington team up for their first all-women volunteer trip

By Victoria Obermeyer

As the sun rolled behind the mountains, Lisa Black, who has been both a volunteer and employee of WTA for over 22 years, and Erin McMillin, WTA's multiday trips program coordinator, happily greeted their all-women crew. As the crew spent the evening getting to know each other, birds sang their evening songs and a doe and her two fawns made a trip to the nearby creek.

The volunteers from WTA and Back Country Horsemen of Washington (BCHW) were eager to work for 5 days, rebuilding and maintaining trails in the remote Pasayten Wilderness, a region drastically impacted by wildfires.

BCHW and WTA have been collaborating for years, but this trip was the first of its kind, an all-women volunteer vacation for the two groups. Tim Van Beek, a Pasayten project manager for BCHW and former WTA employee who has long worked to create inclusive trips for trail work volunteers, led the charge.

Lisa and Erin were both excited to be part of the crew.

"I see this trip as part of a long legacy of hikers and horses working together to build trails in remote parts of Washington. Horses and other stock animals allow us to get so much farther into the backcountry than we could as just hikers. They literally take the weight off of our backs," Erin said. "What trails for everyone means for me is it's not



just providing a space that's technically open for everyone but inviting for everyone."

Because of the literal horsepower on this trip, the crew was able to camp 10 miles in on the Billy Goat Trail. The horses carried the team's tools, food and other important gear, which let the crew save some of their energy for the trail work. The horses also assisted in day-to-day work like carrying tools and water to the crew as they worked on parts of the trail miles from the campsite.

The four horses — Lakota, Ginger, Zephyr and Roxy — were the stars of the trip. Cathy Upper and Jill Calvert, the horses' owners, are horse packers who have a combined 7 decades of experience in the backcountry with horses.

The women on the trip represented a range of ages, every decade from 20s to 70s. They also had a range of backcountry

experience. Some had never spent a night backpacking; others had been on several multiday trail work parties. A few women, like BCHW volunteer Brenda Stevens, were reconnecting with the outdoors in ways they hadn't in decades. A Washingtonian who had spent her 20s exploring and backpacking not far from the trail the crew worked on, Brenda was excited to return to the Pasayten. Since starting a family, she hadn't had the opportunity to spend time like this in the backcountry, but a trip with all women helped her feel comfortable starting again.

The Pasayten has been hit hard by wildfire in the last few years. The Billy Goat Trail specifically was impacted by the Diamond Creek Fire in 2017 and the Cub Creek Fire in 2021.

“(Being here) brings back a lot of memories. We’ve seen a lot of fires come through here. Living close, you’re in tune with the fires and the destruction they cause,” said Brenda, who lives in Okanogan.

Cathy has also noticed the changes over the years and appreciates the chance to help support trails where she has spent so much time.

“I’ve been here for 45 years ... and the trails used to be in fabulous shape. You could look at a map and go down any trail you wanted — you can’t do that anymore,” she said.

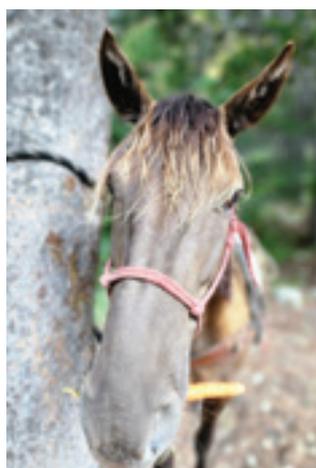
On this trip, the effect the fires have had on the trail — and the trees — was obvious. With little to no shade for most of the hike, the team cherished any breaks from the sun, taking time to communicate when they needed to stop, something that somehow felt easier among a group of all women.

Wildfires can make trails impassible or inhospitable to hikers, and even well-established trails can rapidly vanish after fires. However, thanks to the hard work of 12 women and four horses, over 5 miles of trails were restored for the benefit of both hikers and horses alike.

“I was just so thankful to hear the stories of all these women who have



Lisa Black, who has over 23 years of service with WTA, talks about tool safety to a joint group of WTA and BCHW volunteers.



come before me. And it reminded me that a lot has changed in our lifetimes. I do not underestimate the power of representation in my life and the opportunities it's opened for me,” Erin said. “All-women trips provide the space for women to try new things without the pressure of trying to prove that they should be there.”

WTA, BCHW and Glazer’s Camera partnered on a short film to commemorate this special trip. Watch it at go.wta.org/watchBCHW.

Join us on trail

This volunteer vacation was one of many shared-identity volunteer trail work trips that WTA offers throughout the year. To learn more, visit go.wta.org/sharedidentity.

Photo by Victoria Obermeyer and Paula Boston



Belonging and Joy

One WTA staff member's journey to finding her space in the outdoors

By Tiffany Chou

Angelic Friday works on the American Ridge trail in Naches with one of WTA's Lost Trails Found crews.

You can often find WTA's Angelic Friday deep in the backcountry on a Lost Trails Found trip, leading an all-BIPOC WTA volunteer work party, pulling together trail projects for the Emerging Leaders Program or hitting the trail just for fun. She's been an integral part of WTA's team for years, but her love of the outdoors began much earlier.

An early start

Angelic grew up curious about nature and excited to spend time outside. As a kid, she played on the beaches of Bainbridge Island, watching crabs and finding sand dollars. She explored the woods, where she discovered hidden forts and old tree houses. And she joined the Girl Scouts, sometimes spending a full week in the woods at camp. She calls her relationship with the outdoors as a child “playful.” Things like hiking weren't on her radar — yet.

“I was the kid that was like, ‘How long do we need to be out here? Are we almost there? I'm tired.’ Girl Scout leaders and everyone that met me at camp could probably attest to that,” Angelic said. “I did enjoy being outdoors, but I wouldn't say I was necessarily someone that you would find doing a bunch of activities like hiking and camping all the time.”

Throughout her teen years, Angelic found herself stepping away from the outdoors, filling her time with other summer activities. She kept busy by participating in — and coaching for — color guard (including flag and wooden rifle spinning), playing the bass clarinet and alto saxophone, being in the marching band and enjoying many other hobbies.

A few years after high school, she moved to Arizona for something new. She had lived in Washington for so long, and it was all she knew.

Returning home

In Arizona, Angelic found another kind of beauty. She delighted in driving to the canyons to stargaze and looked for other ways to get outside when it wasn't too hot.

Only a couple of years later, though, Angelic chose to head back to Washington — she missed the gray Pacific Northwest. Back in her home state, her relationship with hiking took off. Her goal was to find friends to hike with and get out on trail.

Angelic likes to hike in her spare time, including this trip to Buckhorn Peak on the Olympic Peninsula.



“When I was away from Washington in the desert, I missed the green trees. I missed wanting to be outside and walking and not having it be too hot,” Angelic said. “Being away from Washington really showed me how much I enjoy being outdoors.”

Like it did for many others, life turned upside down for Angelic when the pandemic hit. Hiking became a mental sanctuary for her.

“It was an activity I could do with friends and by myself. In a world where so much was happening with the pandemic, hiking became my favorite activity because I could ‘turn off’ and have that alone time and space if I needed it,” Angelic said.

From personal to professional

Angelic's growing love of hiking began to spread to her professional life. Her first foray into the outdoor industry was working as a Washington State Parks park aide. The work included some trail maintenance and a lot of connecting with the community. Although she enjoyed the experience, she learned that her true interest was in more complex, involved trail work.

“Being able to do some basic trail tasks made me want to make a bigger impact, be a good steward of the land, help others and give back,” Angelic said. ▶

WTA's professional Lost Trails Found crews take on projects deep in the backcountry or technical work that requires additional training or time. When Angelic saw a job posting for the crew, it seemed like the type of work she was looking for, so she sent in her application and crossed her fingers.

The summer of 2022 was Angelic's first season with WTA and the Lost Trails Found crew. It was her first time doing such intensive trail work and her first time backpacking. Although it was like being thrown in at the deep end, she embraced the crash course.

"It was all completely new for me. I had never done anything in this realm before," Angelic said. "I had a bit of imposter syndrome, and it felt nice to come to a place with a welcoming environment. It made me feel like I could take the time to learn and sharpen these skills."

Over time, she became a trail expert, taking over as crew leader for Lost Trails Found in the summer of 2023.

Becoming a leader

After her first season with the Lost Trails Found crew, Angelic was looking for something to do in the off-season. One of the reasons she had wanted a career in the outdoors was because she knew it hadn't always been the most welcoming for people of color. She wanted to make a difference in the historically homogeneous industry.

A couple of folks she met during her first season with Lost Trails Found had a powerful impact on her. Her crew leader, Zachary Toliver, was Black. As a Black woman, it was a big deal to Angelic to see someone like herself in an outdoor leadership position. And Austin Easter, Angelic's supervisor, was a strong mentor. Both Zachary and Austin encouraged her to take on more leadership opportunities, which eventually included applying to lead WTA's Emerging Leaders Program.

Every year, the Emerging Leaders Program hires four participants and one crew leader from often-underrepresented



Angelic and the 2023 Emerging Leaders Program crew during a work party at Wallace Falls.

communities to train them in trail work, as well as offer opportunities for professional development, leadership and networking with other outdoor organizations and BIPOC leaders in this space. Angelic has now spearheaded the program for 2 years, fostering an inclusive space for these individuals to blossom into outdoor leaders.

"Professionally, meeting the cohort and creating more spaces for people of color to interact with the Emerging Leaders has been inspiring. Seeing them grow and develop connections while learning and honing these skills — and seeing where that success takes them after the program

A statewide honor

Every other year, the Washington State Trails Coalition honors "an emerging leader who has distinguished themselves with a significant, positive contribution to any aspect of Washington's trails" with an Emerging Leader award. This year, Angelic Friday won that award thanks to her work with Lost Trails Found and the Emerging Leaders Program over the last 2 years.

Photo by Angelic Friday

— has been fulfilling,” Angelic said. “It has been empowering as a Black woman to enter and take up space in this industry. To enter this traditionally marginalized space and help change the narrative to make these spaces more inclusive, supportive and inviting. To help pave the way for more BIPOC individuals to know there is a place for them here and uplift their voices.”

These days, when she’s not leading a Lost Trails Found crew or working with the Emerging Leaders Program, Angelic organizes and leads all-BIPOC volunteer trail work parties and helps out at WTA’s gear libraries, so that our partner organizations can borrow items like tents and snowshoes for group trips.

Angelic has continued to work with WTA for many reasons — the mission, the trail work, the culture — but there’s one thing in particular that keeps her coming back.

“I continue to work for WTA because of the people. The community I’ve been able to make within WTA has been amazing,” Angelic said. “It’s been really cool to have a lot of genuine and authentic people to work with. You don’t get that in a lot of other spaces.”

Spreading the joy

In Angelic’s free time, she often searches out her own pocket of nature. One of her highlights this year was sharing her outdoor joy with those closest to her. She took her dad on his first-ever

backpacking trip, at the Ozette Triangle on the Olympic Coast. “He’s been a strong advocate for me and proud of what I’ve accomplished with WTA. It was nice to share that part of my life with him. He had never experienced the outdoors in that way,” Angelic said. “He enjoyed being out there and learning backpacking skills, like filtering water and cooking with a backcountry stove. He wants to spend more time outdoors and said it was life-changing for him in some ways, for us to spend time together like this and for him to become comfortable with backpacking.”

Angelic has found ways to spread her love of the outdoors in many ways: by making a career out of it, by spending time outside with people she cares about and by incorporating time in nature into her everyday life. Finding peace and a community within the outdoors has been a lifelong journey for her, and she’s excited to see how it will keep teaching her and helping her grow in the future.

“It’s been a joy to learn more, to meet other individuals in this industry and also to share my knowledge,” Angelic said. “Getting out, enjoying your time, finding wonder and curiosity — there’s so much to learn. The Earth is ours, and it’s nice to learn how to be a good steward and enjoy the benefits, the healing and everything else that comes with being able to enjoy your time outdoors.” ■



Help the Snoqualmie Tribe spread its message by encouraging others to learn more and practice Tribal land acknowledgement both on and off the trails.

Commit to experience the lands in a way that is centered in mindfulness, rather than conquest

The Snoqualmie Tribe Ancestral Lands Movement seeks to spread awareness of the Snoqualmie people who have lived in the southern Salish Sea region since time immemorial and share the significance of these lands and provide information on how people can help the Tribe in respecting, restoring, and protecting these lands. As the Salish Sea region has grown in population, the Snoqualmie Tribe's Ancestral Lands have been heavily impacted by recreation. This impact is especially apparent at the popular trails in the Snoqualmie corridor area, where increased visitation has resulted in a degradation of the land.

Learn more about the Snoqualmie Tribe and its history and deep connection to these lands, and support the work the Tribe does today to continue stewarding these lands by following us on social media:

- Facebook (Snoqualmie Tribe Ancestral Lands Movement)
- Instagram (@snotribeancestrallandsmovement)





Catherine and her friends Shannon and Joanna on an early season snowshoe trip to Myrtle Falls at Mount Rainier.

My Year at Rainier

One hiker's quest to see it all — and how WTA helped her get there

By Catherine Vine

I took a step and my leg sunk calf-deep in mud. I swatted away a few mosquitoes, sighed and kept going. I was 10 miles into an 18-mile day and I was hot, tired and admittedly a bit cranky. I was also 2 hours delayed in meeting my friend, who was patiently waiting for me to arrive so we could finish the trek to Longmire together. Many hours later, after surviving a terrifying river crossing and running from a swarm of angry bees, we were back at our cars and ready to head home in the dark.

Some days are tougher than others, but I've never had a truly bad day at Mount Rainier National Park. Along with the tired legs and blisters come dainty alpine flowers, quiet moments of reflection in dense forests,

fleeting glimpses of wrens and heart-stopping views.

This year, I set a goal of completing all the maintained hikes within the park's boundaries. This quest has taken me to the far-flung reaches of the park — from the quiet Huckleberry Creek trail in the northeast to the seldom-visited stretch of trail where the park boundary meets the Glacier View Wilderness on the west side, and everywhere in between.

Like many, I became enamored with both the mountain itself and the vast wilderness surrounding it when I moved to Washington 5 years ago from the East Coast. I couldn't believe that my weekends could be spent exploring such an incredible place. Since I was a new and inexperienced hiker, I sought out information that would help me be both safe and

Resources for exploring the park

- WTA website: wta.org
- Mount Rainier National Park website: nps.gov/mora
- Backpacking permits, camping sites and timed entry reservations: recreation.gov

Winter hike ideas

Find year-round hiking suggestions and details on these hikes at wta.org/RainierYear.

Green Lake

Starting point: Carbon River park entrance

Distance: 9.6 miles roundtrip

Elevation gain: 1,500 feet

Wonderland Trail from Longmire to Cougar Rock Campground

Starting point: Longmire

Distance: 3.2 miles roundtrip

Elevation gain: 500 feet

Skyline Trail to Myrtle Falls

Starting point: Paradise

Distance: 0.8 miles roundtrip

Elevation gain: 185 feet



Catherine and her partner, Tracy, pause for a photo at Reflection Lake on a family visit to the park this summer.

respectful to the land and fellow hikers. I discovered the vast array of free resources available on the Washington Trails Association's website, wta.org. I read trip reports, used the online Hiking Guide to select trails and read everything in the Trail Smarts section.

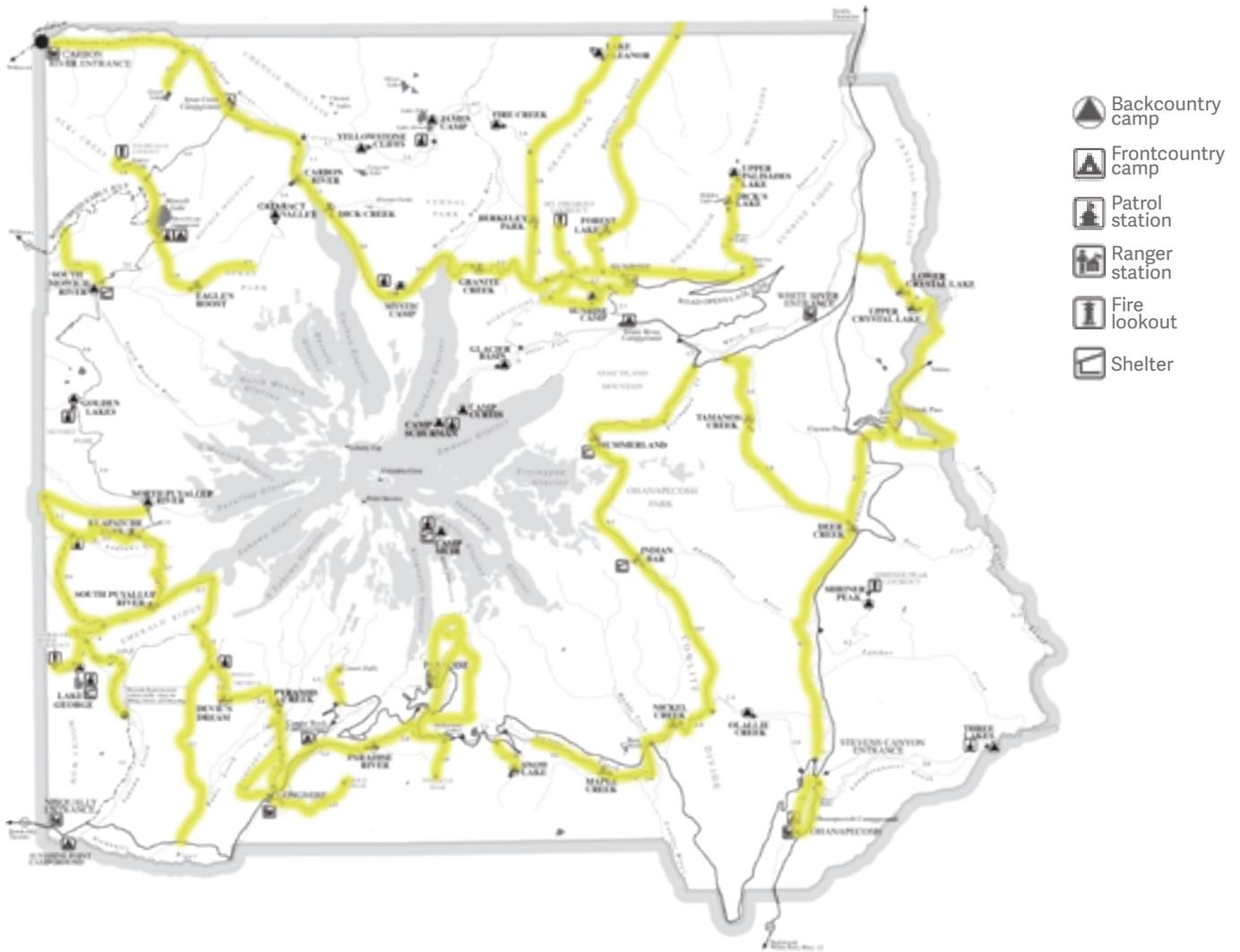
I took my first trip to the mountain that summer with my partner, exploring a short distance along the Sourdough Ridge Trail at Sunrise. I was hooked! I came back a few weeks later, this time solo, and suffered through the climb to the top of the Skyline Trail at Paradise, urging my flatlander legs to take just a few more steps. I panicked when I heard what I thought was a fellow hiker blowing a whistle for help, only to be reassured by passing hikers that it was just a marmot calling. I stumbled on the steep rocky steps, had to sit down a number of times to catch my breath and came home with an epic sunburn, yet I was still eager for my next visit.

This is the power of the mountain and the reason over 2.5 million people visited the park in 2023 alone. Since time immemorial, people have been drawn to the area for

the resources it provides, the recreation opportunities available and its overall splendor. The park is celebrating its 125th anniversary this year, and it seemed like a perfect time to spend a year exploring all that it has to offer.

At the start of the year, I had hiked about 92 miles of the over 260 miles of maintained trail within the park's boundaries. Completing them all before the end of the year was an ambitious goal, but one I knew I could complete with good weather, the help of friends and, most importantly, the resources that WTA could provide.

I started planning my project in early spring. By then, I'd already taken several trips to the mountain to snowshoe the trails around Paradise. I knew that many of the upper-elevation trails would be inaccessible or snow-covered for months so I started researching which trails might be manageable come May and June. I turned to WTA's website to see which trails typically had trip reports from the early spring, using the filter feature to narrow the region to Mount Rainier and search by ►



month hiked. I read trip reports going back the last few years, forming a plan of which trails I might be able to tackle first. I created a spreadsheet, listed out all the hikes I needed and scheduled each week. No problem!

Of course, as typically happens, life had other plans. A less-than-average snowpack decided to linger, keeping many trails off-limits later than normal. A round of illness in early July knocked out 2 days of hiking. I failed to secure a spot in the early-access lottery to book backcountry camping reservations. I navigated the complexities of entering the park with the new timed entry reservation trial. I edited my spreadsheet over and over, adjusting to each new challenge.

I don't know if I'll be able to finish hiking every mile of trail in Mount Rainier National Park this year, and I'm honestly

not sure it matters anymore.

My main goal in attempting this project was to spend as much time as possible at the mountain, exploring all over the park. I've had the chance to hike so many new trails, and I did my first overnight trips to the park, along with my first solo backpacking trips. I was able to join a friend for her first hike with her 2-month-old daughter at Ohanapecosh and spend time exploring Tipsoo Lake with visiting family. I got to watch the faces of park guests light up when they first saw the mountain or spotted a marmot sunning on a rock. I've had some grueling, long days on trail with good friends, testing our limits and supporting each other through the hardest parts. I've sat quietly with a friend and six strangers around Aurora Lake while camping at Klapatche Park, watching the sun go down over the

Catherine's Mount Rainier hikes in 2024

Miles hiked: 210.6

Elevation gained: 36,021.78

Miles left to hike in the park: 71.9

Number of trips to the park: 26

Miles hiked solo: 156.6

Unrustables consumed: 27

Bears spotted: 2

Bee stings: 1

Mosquito bites: countless

Blisters: 0!



Looking out toward the Tatoosh range and the shuttered Paradise Inn on a snowshoe trip to Myrtle Falls.

mountain. I spent many days hiking solo, enjoying the opportunity to just be present and quiet. I've met so many wonderful people on trail, from families with young kids enjoying a day outside to Wonderland Trail thru-hikers on their long trek around the mountain.

This, to me, is the best thing about spending time in the park. There is no right or wrong way to do it, whether you drive through the park to take in the incredible scenery, spend a day exploring the trails or stay longer for a backpacking trip. I encourage you to use resources such as WTA's online Hiking Guide and park maps to find new areas to explore. Some of my favorite moments this year happened on less-traveled trails, like watching deer appear out of the mist on a rainy day on the Deadhorse Trail at Paradise or spotting an American dipper taking

food to a nest of chicks inches from the pounding waters of Ohanapecoh Falls along the Eastside Trail.

There are hidden gems all over the park if you take just a moment to find and appreciate them. Come for the stunning views, but stay for the beads of rain adorning mountain ash berries in the fall or a perfect, delicate calypso orchid tucked in among the rocks on the mossy forest floor in the early spring. Whatever you're seeking — solitude or companionship, a long alpine climb or a quiet forest ramble — you can find it here at Mount Rainier National Park, and WTA can help. ■

Catherine Vine followed her passion for hiking to a job with WTA's development team. In the summer she volunteers as a Meadow Rover at Mount Rainier and loves meeting park guests.

Winter road hikes

Seasonal road closures provide a chance to explore sections of the park normally inaccessible to hikers.

Adventure safely in the winter — visit wta.org/winter for tips and learn about avalanche safety at nwac.us. And check the weather and road status before heading out. All visitors to the park are required to carry tire chains from November through April, regardless of weather, and rangers will check for chains at various locations.

Mather Memorial Highway (SR 410)

Starting point: Silver Springs Snow Park off Crystal Mountain Blvd.

Distance: 10 miles roundtrip

Elevation gain: 1,100 feet

Travel along the closed highway from the park entrance, following the White River. Turn around at the junction with Sunrise Road to avoid avalanche terrain.

Westside Road

Starting point: Junction of SR 706 and the Westside Road, 1 mile inside the park via the Nisqually entrance

Distance: 6.4 miles roundtrip

Elevation gain: 760 feet

Park at the closed gate, without blocking the road. Head north on the closed Westside Road to the summer trailhead at Dry Creek, marked with another gate. Stop here to avoid avalanche terrain.

Mowich Road

Starting point: Paul Peak trailhead, about 0.6 miles past the park entrance on Mowich Road

Distance: 10 miles roundtrip

Elevation gain: 1,400 feet

Follow the closed portion of the Mowich Road to Mowich Lake, a beautiful site in the winter. The road to the trailhead is rough.



Community and Generosity

WTA volunteers inspire us daily, and we're so grateful for all of their work. Here are some of their stories.

By Anna Roth



Mikki and Moira
enjoying their first
ever work party at
Naches Peak Loop.

Volunteers power WTA, and they do it all. Trail work, hike research, public education, tool cache construction, trail advocacy, app development ... the list goes on (and even includes unexpected things like pie delivery and 3D printing).

Part of what's incredible about our volunteers is their willingness to commit their time to WTA. Trail work parties run 8 or more hours a day or can even be multiday excursions. Ambassador commitments can be half or full days. Researching and writing up hikes can take an entire weekend!

And yet each year, people dedicate thousands of hours to supporting our work. We've met parents and grandparents, students, people with full-time jobs and people who are brand-new to Washington in our volunteer communities. Trail maintenance volunteers on our summer backcountry trips drive hours from home to spend a week with strangers. Ambassadors stand at trailheads instead of hiking so they can connect with hundreds of people. App



The joy of being outdoors is amplified by the fact that I get to do something that benefits others.

development volunteers regularly work afternoons and evenings, sometimes even weekends. And our volunteers finish their volunteer days smiling, noting how friendly and welcoming the folks they meet are.

The longevity of volunteer commitments is incredible as well. It's not uncommon to meet volunteers who have been with WTA for years. People go to school, get new jobs, have kids, retire and even move away, but they still give their time.

That generosity is central to WTA's volunteer community. It extends to our members, whose financial contributions power all of WTA's work, and it helps us achieve so much each year. There's no way we can highlight every volunteer's contribution; there are too many of you! But here are a few profiles that illustrate how people work WTA into their lives. We are endlessly grateful for these folks and every other person who contributes their time to us each year.

QUALITY TIME ON TRAIL:

Mikki & Moira Boughton

Trail maintenance

For Mikki and her daughter Moira, volunteering with WTA offers a chance to connect with each other and to explore Washington.

"Our family spends as much time as we can outside, and now we can help make that space better," Moira said. "It also is a thing that I get to do with my mom. I am a twin and have two other siblings, so getting one-on-one time with my mom is hard to do. Volunteering with WTA has given us a thing to do together."

The two also use volunteering as a way to explore the state.

"I had the pleasure of working with Moira and Mikki for my first BIPOC work party on the Middle Fork Snoqualmie River trail," said Angelic Friday, one of our crew leaders. "I was delighted to hear that they drove up from

Yakima for it. Mikki said they don't get a lot of opportunities to be in BIPOC-specific spaces and appreciated the thoughtfulness and space that (WTA staff) Moleek and I were able to make for everyone."

Moira and Mikki's first work party was closer to home, though, working on the Naches Loop Trail at Mount Rainier. Mikki loved knowing they were making a difference on a trail that she and her family hike every year, and Moira enjoyed connecting with people from all walks of life, forming bonds with folks she would not have met outside of volunteering.

"Volunteering with WTA gives me a reason to get outdoors more, which is something I am always looking for. The joy of being outdoors is amplified by the fact that I get to do something that benefits others. Volunteering also means that I get to spend time with my family doing something bigger than us," Mikki said. ▶

Photo by Mikki Boughton



I get a sense of satisfaction knowing my hike descriptions might help somebody else find a good hike.



Mary on a return trip to Mount Pilchuck State Park to do research for the Hiking Guide.



Krithika soaks up some fall hiking inspiration to share with other hikers.

SHARING KNOWLEDGE:

Mary Hartman

Hiking Guide correspondent

The first hike Mary Hartman wrote up was for one of her favorite local hikes, W.E. Johnson Park in Richland. WTA didn't have an entry for it, so she just wrote it up and sent it in. She'd never written for WTA before.

"The write-up had everything I look for, plus it was in an area I wanted more info on, so I asked if Mary would be interested in joining my team," said Anna Roth, who manages volunteer Hiking Guide correspondents.

Mary was indeed interested. In 2024, she researched and wrote 14 hikes in just 3 months. Her write-ups are comprehensive and include lots of photos and a GPS track, assets that help Anna review them for publication. They're inspiring, too.

"I love hiking in Eastern Washington,

so it's nice to live vicariously through Mary's research trips," Anna said.

Mary, like other volunteer correspondents on the team, revisits hikes to confirm details and often has to navigate rugged, overgrown trails. She makes weekends out of research trips to maximize her time. But the research can be challenging. Her favorite trip was also her worst — Long Lake, south of Republic.

"The trail itself was awful because it's horribly overgrown, but the camping was fabulous. It's in a gorgeous forest, there were only a handful of people in the campground, the loons were calling, the weather was perfect, and another camper gave me a nice fresh trout to cook for my supper," Mary said.

Mary's research gave Central and Eastern Washington hikers, including wheelchair hikers and those looking for a more rugged experience, new places to explore. She likes doing it, too.

"I'm happy to be able to contribute to the Hiking Guide, which my family has used for years," she said. "I get a sense of satisfaction knowing my hike descriptions might help somebody else find a good hike."

FINDING COMMUNITY:

Krithika Sankaranarayanan
Ambassador

Krithika's favorite thing about WTA is the people she works with.

Before joining WTA, she did not feel like she belonged in the Pacific Northwest. She missed family and friends back home in India. But on trail, Krithika found a community of people she felt connected to.

She discovered WTA in 2021, when she overheard some people discussing WTA on a hike. She was interested in joining a work party but was also hesitant; she wasn't sure she was physically strong



enough to do trail work. But the hikers emphasized that there is something for everyone at a work party, so Krithika joined an all-women’s work party.

“My first work party, which also happened to be my first community work, brought an immense sense of pride in giving back to the community and hence a sense of belonging,” she said. Krithika doesn’t consider herself a “party person,” but on trail crews she is one, bringing laughter to the work with an abundance of dad jokes. Her comfort as a trail crew member inspired Krithika to become even more engaged — she’s now an ambassador and an enthusiastic Hike-a-Thoner. “When we really like something, we also know how to make time for it,” she said.

Krithika feels like she was an ambassador for WTA before she officially became one, telling anyone who would listen about WTA’s hiking resources and community.

“This is common in ambassadors; because the WTA community has given them so much, they want to share it with others,” said Nicole Masih-Theberge, who manages the WTA ambassador program.

Krithika values being an ambassador because it allows her to teach other hikers about WTA and helps them understand all the work that goes into trails. It may even inspire another new-to-Washington hiker to find community through WTA!

TAKING INITIATIVE:

Finn Gilbert
Trail maintenance

During the school year, when Finn balances volunteering with school, he saves at least one weekend each month for trail work. In the summer, however, he gives much more time. His energy, kindness and welcoming spirit have a positive effect on both the trails and the community. We’re lucky he discovered us, and we have his family to thank for that.

When he was a high school freshman, Finn told his mom he wanted a fun volunteer opportunity, and she recommended seeing what WTA offers. Despite his first work party being on a scorching day, he had fun. A warm welcome and support from crew leaders Micki Kedzierski and Kaci Darsow made Finn feel like he belonged on the crew, and he quickly decided he wanted to be part of WTA’s community long term.



Finn’s positive attitude — and his variety of wool coats — can be counted on at any work party!

“**This is our neighborhood park. We walk our dogs here, and I run through the park — this is part of taking care of our park.**”

Finn is known for making friends on trail, and his friendship with Micki has grown through their many days of working together. Finn’s enthusiasm shines through in everything he does, whether it’s tackling rock work or recruiting his family to join him on trail. His dad, sister and youngest brother have all done at least one work party, and Finn and his sister have done youth volunteer vacations.

The initiative Finn shows in recruiting people also shines through in his work. During a break on a chilly Martin Luther King Jr. Day work party, Finn cleared graffiti from the trailhead, saying, “This is our neighborhood park. We walk our dogs here, and I run through the park — this is part of taking care of our park.”

His willingness to go above and beyond is an example of his commitment to making a difference. Finn’s ability to embrace new challenges and meet new people with enthusiasm makes him a strong leader and a beloved member of the WTA community. ▶

Photos by Mary Hartman, Vaish Venugopalan, Kaci Darsow



Emma Royce (left) dons her new blue hat alongside fellow new crew leader Jim Clute.

“
**WTA gives me
a community.**”

LIFETIME ENGAGEMENT:

Emma Royce Trail maintenance

Emma Royce first learned about WTA when she was 12, flipping through a WTA magazine. When she saw an article about youth volunteer vacations, she knew she wanted to try one, but she had to wait 2 years until she was old enough.

Her dad took her to a day work party for families at Paradise Point State Park in the meantime. She loved it, and once she turned 14, Emma finally got to participate in multiple youth volunteer vacations.

Since that first work party, WTA has been part of Emma's life. She's forged connections that have lasted years and has delved into WTA beyond trail work. She was a WTA youth ambassador, which she credits with helping her develop her confidence, public speaking, problem-solving and leadership skills. Even as she earned her degree in terrestrial and aquatic ecology, she continued to volunteer doing trail work, frequently with her friends or roommates.

“Emma is great. It's been really inspiring to see her go from youth volunteer ambassador to a volunteer in college to now leading crews on her own. It's been really cool, especially, to see her work at WSU Vancouver with their outdoor recreation program,” said Stasia Honnold, our Southwest Washington regional coordinator.

Now a college graduate, Emma is back home in the Vancouver area. Despite frequent, weeklong trips to remote parts of Alaska to conduct aquatic ecology studies for work, Emma still finds time to be a volunteer crew leader, leading work parties during her weekends. She loves to work with new volunteers and incorporates her knowledge of ecology as she teaches trail work skills. Her superpower is coming up with icebreaker questions that no one has ever heard of before.

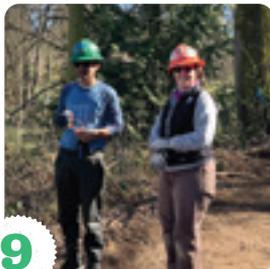
“WTA gives me a community,” Emma said, when she thinks about why she keeps coming back despite her very full schedule. “Trail work is fun and exciting, but the social part of WTA is what makes it so special and has kept me coming back and wanting to be more and more involved for years.” ■

Photo by Stasia Honnold

AWARDS

Above and Beyond

So much of WTA's work hinges on volunteers, and we appreciate each person, whether they join us for one day or a thousand. Each year, we acknowledge a handful of folks who have gone the extra mile. We deeply appreciate them. They'll join past Above and Beyond award winners in our Rock Wall of Fame online, wta.org/WallOfFame.



1. Lisa Holmes
Advocacy volunteer since 2018

2. Kathleen Lange
Ambassador and trail maintenance volunteer since 2002

3. Rolan Shomber
Communications volunteer since 2015

4. Stephanie Shadbolt
Communications (since 2012) and trail maintenance volunteer (since 2004)

5. Finn Gilbert
Trail maintenance volunteer since 2023

6. Mercedes Quinn-Blair
Trail maintenance volunteer since 2022

7. Judée Jagow
Trail maintenance volunteer since 2018

8. Melissa Perozzo
Trail maintenance volunteer since 2012

9. Carole Bianquis
Trail maintenance volunteer since 2006

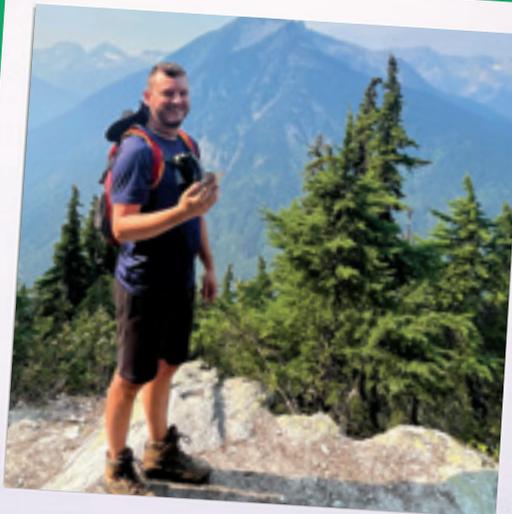
10. Bryan Villa
Trail maintenance volunteer since 2022

11. Emma Royce
Trail maintenance volunteer since 2015

Real Hikers, Real Local

WTA's Hiking Guide is written by people who live here

By Anna Roth



2



3



1

You may be familiar with the work WTA's volunteer trail crews do, but did you know that the information for more than 1,000 trails on wta.org was written by volunteers?

Since 2014, I've been working with a group of Hiking Guide correspondents who have provided WTA with ground-truthed hiking and driving directions to help you get to your next hike. These volunteers make time for this in lives already full of work, family, friends and even other WTA-related obligations — many also do trail work or are outreach ambassadors.

The team's focus is on providing reliable information from first-person research. We offer specific details in the hike descriptions to enhance your hike. You'll likely learn something by reading them,

like what flowers you're hiking past, what that peak in the distance is or a bit about the history of the area. Read the driving directions, and you'll get notes about easy-to-miss turns or the last spot for a flush toilet.

Each Hiking Guide correspondent has a notable voice or area of expertise. Botanists, historians, airline engineers, students and climbers populate the team. Their hiking preferences range from intense bushwhacks to low-key, close-to-town walks. And they live all over the state, so we can provide local knowledge for hikers across Washington.

Though some of the original team has moved on, new hikers have stepped up. Through 10 years of managing the team, I've met dozens of kind, energetic, passionate and community-minded

hikers. It is heartwarming to work with such a lovely group of people. You can meet a few of them here. And there are many more, diligently hiking and writing away so you can embark on your next big adventure.

1 David Hagen

David Hagen has been writing for WTA for years, with a focus on Central Washington. Even before the correspondent team was formed, he was writing for the Hike It section of the magazine. These days, he spends his downtime relaxing with a good book in his yard, re-energizing for his next hike.

"I think the fall, winter and spring hiking over here is so good and would like more people to know about it. ... I have found that write-ups by locals who know the hikes well are generally more accurate, both for the route and for directions to the trailhead."

4



5



6



2 Wes Partch

An exterior-markings designer for Boeing by day, Wes Partch routinely takes on some of the gnarlier trails in Washington. He's willing to head out to the far edge of the Olympic Peninsula with very little beta. He's offered insight into gorgeous rainforest hikes that rival the popular Hoh River and always writes a trip report in addition to his Hiking Guide write-up.

"I'm proud to be a part of the vast amount of goodness that WTA does."

3 Rolan Shomber

Rolan Shomber volunteers with the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest in addition to WTA, and he wrote the entries for many of the trails in the Methow Valley and surrounding area. His trips often involve log climbing or

bushwhacking, and he documents both the trail and the maintenance needed to get it back into shape.

"Starting in the late 1960s, I can remember how valuable my dad's copies of the '100 Hikes' books were in deciding where to go hiking. So, now I am happy to support the modern version of hike descriptions as part of the WTA Hiking Guide correspondent team."

4 Yasuhiko Obara

Yasuhiko Obara has been part of the team since the beginning a decade ago and is excited for the next 10 years.

"I'm a retired aircraft engineer. I was originally born in Japan and moved to the state in 1986. I absolutely adore the natural beauty Washington has to offer. I hope I still have many years left to explore."

5 Linda Roe

Linda Roe, a trip reporter and Hike-a-Thoner before she was a Hiking Guide writer, focuses on botany and Leave No Trace tips in her write-ups. She spends some of her spare time sewing hiking bandannas.

"Part of a hike, to me, is seeing (plants or notable geologic features) along the trail. I like to work a bit of that into the write-ups and hope to inspire other hikers to enjoy the journey on the way to the destination."

6 PJ Heusted

PJ Heusted is a Washington Conservation Corps crew member by day and a relatively new member of the team.

"I love getting to scratch my research itch and adventure itch at the same time by exploring hidden corners of Washington. It is so special to be a part of a team that breathes new life into lesser-known trails."



A young hiker takes a break at Big Gulch Park in Mukilteo.

Kids Need Nature. Hikers Can Help.

By Linnea Johnson

The Trail Next Door

As part of our Trail Next Door campaign, WTA is working to increase equitable access to nature by prioritizing urban trail projects in areas where neighbors don't have access to a park within a 10-minute walk, like Glendale Forest in south King County and Loganberry Lane in Everett.

As a hiker, you know that when you step onto the trail, something just feels right. If you have kids in your life, you may have seen how that shows up for them, too. When you go outside together, everything just feels a little easier.

Dr. Pooja Tandon and Dr. Danette Glassy know this feeling well, not only as a parent and grandparent, respectively, who love being outdoors with their families, but also as pediatricians and researchers. They've dedicated their careers to understanding the benefits of time outdoors for kids' health and to putting their findings into action as fierce advocates for children's access to nature.

"As a mom raising two boys, especially in those early years, I found that parenting was easier when we were outdoors. We all really enjoyed being together, and we were able to engage in healthy behaviors together. I think it is a really promising and under-tapped opportunity for families to engage in something together

that promotes all of their health," Pooja said.

However, in recent decades, opportunities for kids to be outdoors have decreased, even as robust evidence of the importance of nature for kids continues to stack up.

"As time has rolled on, more and more evidence has supported that children's health can be supported through time in nature. And yet, what we were seeing among our families and our friends and specifically our patients was this divide ... so many competing priorities and barriers were keeping them from accessing that time outdoors," Danette said.

Those barriers are numerous and are often baked into the structures of our culture and society, from a lack of free time due to long work hours, to inequitable access to parks. Majority-BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color) neighborhoods tend to have less tree canopy and access to green

space than predominantly White neighborhoods, due to the historical practice of redlining and ongoing systemic racism in housing and zoning policies.

"So, Pooja and I got together to hone the tools that would help parents face some of the barriers to time in nature for kids," Danette said.

In their new book "Digging Into Nature," Danette and Pooja show why being in nature is so good for kids and families. They also provide practical insights to help parents work more nature time into their children's lives, as well as activities to make the most of that time outdoors. Their ideas are conveniently broken down by developmental stage, from infancy through the teenage years. Additionally, they offer activities that are attuned to a variety of cultural backgrounds and include adaptations for parents of children with special health care needs.

Happier, healthier and more resilient

The evidence is overwhelming: Being in nature provides countless benefits to kids' physical, mental and emotional health. And in "Digging Into Nature," Danette and Pooja present these benefits in ways that are accessible and actionable.

For example, spending time outside encourages physical activity in ways that boost kids' mood and self-esteem, setting the stage for an active life. It's mentally stimulating and physically demanding in ways that promote quality sleep at night. Daily time in nature and breaks outdoors can help reduce the risk of nearsightedness.

In 2020, Pooja's research team conducted a survey of 1,000 U.S. parents during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Families that lived within a 10-minute walk of a park reported better mental health among both children and parents.

However, according to the Trust for Public Land, one in three Americans lack access to a park within 10 minutes of their home. Pooja and her colleagues at the Trust for Public Land are working to change that with the 10-Minute Walk Program, which calls upon mayors to accelerate the creation of parks that support equitable, healthy and thriving communities.

While some of these benefits may feel intuitive for hikers, the peer-reviewed research Danette and Pooja cite throughout "Digging Into Nature" is critical when asking policymakers for increased funding for parks, trails and programs that expand access to the outdoors.

Volunteering: A source of nature time and hope

Nature has long been shown to help kids and teens reduce stress and recover from traumatic experiences. But more often pediatricians are seeing a new form of stress affecting kids as young as elementary school: climate change anxiety. In addition to the immediate stress of natural disasters, like wildfires and the resulting smoke, young people



Science shows that time in nature is good for kids' physical, mental and emotional health.

Youth dig into nature with WTA

WTA's award-winning youth trail program creates opportunities for volunteers ages 10+ to attend work parties and for youth ages 14–18 to spend a week at a time in the wilderness on volunteer vacations. Participants spend time in nature and connect with one another, but also build a sense of empowerment to take action for the natural world.

are experiencing ongoing emotional distress due to the negative changes to the environment caused by climate change.

Early research suggests that participating in efforts to care for nature, like ecological restoration or trail work, can help alleviate these emotions.

"There are all the benefits of being in nature and moving in nature, but when you're doing something that's restorative to the Earth, there's a different sort of connection it forms for the young person, or any person. It can play a role in that climate grief or climate anxiety because it can engender hope. It can engender this idea that 'I am part of the solution,'" Pooja said.

Danette noted that Tribes are

leading the way on creating opportunities to give back to the land.

"As we were researching this book, I found that, all across the country, Tribal nations are promoting and holding ecological restoration events for their communities and are inviting the broader community to come together," Danette said.

You don't have to be a parent to help

Kids' access to nature matters to everyone — because all children deserve to experience the joy and health benefits of time in nature and because the future of our shared world is in their hands.

Whether or not you have kids in your life, people like you who love the outdoors can play a key role in ►



The authors of “Digging Into Nature” encourage everyone, whether they’re parents or not, to support efforts to make nature more accessible for kids.

expanding kids’ access to nature. By taking action, we can build a world that has more green spaces and where all families feel welcome in the outdoors.

“We know that having parks or having green spaces does not mean that people are going to go there and use them ... so, what does that next step look like? How do you help people feel like they belong there? How do you help them feel joy there? Feel confident navigating those places?” Pooja said.

Pooja and Danette encourage people who are comfortable in the outdoors to serve as “nature mentors.”

“If you’re a person who’s very comfortable on trails or engaging in any sort of nature activity, like camping or backpacking, think about those in your life — it could be your kids’ or your grandkids’ friends or neighbors — who maybe don’t know what opportunities are out there. Could they borrow some equipment? Could they tag along with you?” Pooja said.

Danette encourages nature mentors to think outside the box with activities and programming.

“Don’t discount the littlest kids. Make sure newborns to 3-year-olds are accounted for and programmed for. Think outside traditional hours as well — since some families work two jobs, is there a night get-together? Especially in the PNW, it gets dark so early (in the winter), so stretch your thoughts on when you can access nature with others,” Danette said.

On a systemic level, Pooja and Danette encourage all of us to look for opportunities to leverage our influence for more green spaces and nature time, whether that be in schools, community organizations, faith-based groups, local governments or beyond.

“That could be through your school board, through having a meeting with somebody at your school about what kinds of opportunities are available to your children. Call out when recess is canceled or ask for after-school clubs that can encourage outdoor activities,” Pooja said.

Collective action for kids’ access to nature works. For example: In recent decades, recess time in Washington has shrunk, with some kids getting as little as 10 minutes of recess per day. Just as a mental and behavioral health crisis was on the rise, kids were losing their opportunity to play, social time and physical activity outdoors. So, families, educators, organizations and pediatricians like Pooja came together as part of the King County Play Equity Coalition to speak up for recess. In 2023, their efforts paid off: The Washington State Legislature passed a law requiring at least 30 minutes of recess for elementary school children, discouraging the withholding of recess as punishment and more. That law just went into effect this fall. ■

Check out “Digging Into Nature,” then look for ways to speak up for equitable access to nature in your community. [go.wta.org/diggingintonature](https://www.wta.org/diggingintonature).

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A Cure for Trail Burnout

If you're feeling a bit blah about hiking, these tips can help you find the spark again.

By Craig Romano

Enjoying a new trail, like Craig's family is here at Tla-hut-um Regional Park in British Columbia, can help reignite a passion for hiking.

For the past 12 years, Sept. 1 has elicited the same reaction from me — a sigh of relief. I don't have to hike today! That may seem counter to what you expect to hear, but let me explain. The month of August is Washington Trails Association's annual Hike-a-Thon, which I proudly participate in to raise money for our trails, and I put in some serious time. I often cover more than 300 miles and hit the trail every day of the month. By the end of Hike-a-Thon, I am ready to take a break, although it's often a short reprieve as two of my biggest passions in life are hiking and running. But for someone who hikes and runs for a living — putting in upward of 2,500 miles a year for decades — is it possible to get trail burnout? Yes.

Like almost everything in life, hiking can sometimes lose its appeal, feel rote or grow stale. And like many aspects of life, my feelings and engagement with being on the trail ebb and flow. Sure, there are a few of you out there who never tire of the trail, regardless of circumstances or points in your lives. But most of us are subject to burning out, growing bored or just losing our zest if something becomes routine. Or if we don't grow, learn and perhaps shake things up a little along the way.

When I feel burnout approaching and realize that I'm not excited about hitting the trail, it's time for a change. And even when inertia is weighing heavy on me, a change almost always renews my relationship with hiking. Usually within no time,

my desire to be on the trail is strong again. I excitedly peruse guidebooks, websites, trip reports and maps to plan out my next trail adventure.

So here's my formula of changes to help refresh and restore your love of hitting the trail.

Change the scenery

Start hiking new trails! There's comfort in the familiar. But there is a sense of adventure in the unknown. One of the things that has helped me stay so excited about hiking in Washington is that I get to hike in every corner of the state — and this state is diverse and full of surprises. If you've never ventured far from the I-90 or Highway 2 corridors, make it a point to expand your hiking horizons. Plan a trip to the San Juan Islands in the winter, the Olympic Coast or Columbia River Gorge in the spring and the Kettle River Range in the fall.

Sample some different types of trails. Check out our state's extensive rail trails and urban trail systems. Explore the trails in our state parks and national wildlife refuges. Visit land trust preserves, college campus trails and county parks.

Go farther. If you have the time and means, explore trails in other parts of the country or in other countries. I frequently hike in British Columbia, California and on the East Coast. I am always mesmerized by unfamiliar plants and animals or blown away by landscapes that can't be found in the Northwest — like



Are you traveling to see family for the holidays? If you are, finding time to hike in a new area can be a great way to get excited about time outside.

barrier islands, badlands, deserts, tallgrass prairies, bayous and northern hardwood forests. I especially like to head to the Southwest and Southeast for hiking during our wet months in the Northwest.

Change the routine

Do you have a set way of doing things? Time to try new ways. Hike alone? How about taking a friend along on a hike — or better yet, meeting new hiking friends through outdoor recreation groups. Hiking with others gives you a chance to build new friendships, and it can bring together people with different backgrounds who share a similar passion. You can learn from each other's different perspectives on hiking, the outdoors and the world in general. Bring a newbie on a hike and watch them glow. Share in their fascination with things you may not notice anymore. Learn to see the world like a child and you'll never grow bored.

Conversely, if you always hike in groups, go alone. Practice becoming more assured and confident on the trail. See things you've never seen before without the distractions of a companion. Hear the sounds of the wilderness uninterrupted by conversations. You might see more wildlife, too, as noises and groups of folks tend to keep the critters at a distance.

Change the time. Are you an afternoon hiker? Set the alarm and hit the trail before dawn to experience a whole new ambiance on the trail. There are few things more magical than the early morning light dancing on a mountaintop and making the forests and waterways shine. If you always try to get home before dinner, stay out late and savor a wilderness sunset or be awed by the alpenglow turning the skyline a brilliant red.

Try a new tradition. If you always head to trail x to celebrate or mark a

special occasion, maybe it's time to try trail y or z instead. If you've never had a hiking tradition, maybe it's time to start one now, visiting a certain trail at regular intervals and noting the changes that occur on it with each visit.

Change the direction

Go a new way. Have you always hiked the Heather-Maple Pass Loop or Cape Horn Loop clockwise? Time to hike it counterclockwise! I can't tell you how many times I've returned to a familiar loop hike and decided to change my direction and it felt like a completely different hike. In essence, it is! You will see things from a different angle, experience the ups and downs in a different fashion, and notice things you completely missed before.

Likewise, check out side trails you've skipped before. There have been times I finally hiked a spur or side trail and couldn't believe I hadn't checked it out sooner because it led to an unbelievably beautiful view, lake or forest. ▶



Seeing a trail in the snow, like this hike at Lily Lake on Blanchard Mountain, can give you a new perspective on a well-known trail.

Change the season

Do you always hike in summer when the sun is shining, the days are warm and there's ample daylight? Time to embrace the winter! Go for a hike in the rain! Check out a familiar trail in the winter to get views you've never had before thanks to the lack of foliage. Winter hiking also brings far fewer other hikers, no bugs and less chance of encountering menaces like rattlesnakes or ticks. It's a great time to check out some of those Columbia River basin trails you've always wanted to hike.

Change the pace

Are you a fast hiker? Try slowing down. Instead of speeding to the visual payoff at trail's end, go for the journey. Bring field guides or download apps that will help you identify and learn about the area's flora and fauna. Learn about the area's human history and look for artifacts along the way. Learning more about the natural and cultural history of the area you're hiking through allows you to see it in a new light.

Have you always been more of an ambler? Consider running and seeing how much ground you can

cover. Graduate to ultra-running and then plan trails and routes for challenges. I've done the same 30-mile loops as 3-day hikes and 12-hour runs, the experiences of each offer something vastly different.

Train for a big race like your first 50-kilometer or more, and then start looking at trails as your training grounds. The trails will take on a whole new meaning in your life as measurements of your commitment, drive, determination and mental resiliency. Look at the trails as your health club.

Change the perspective

Tired of popular trails? Then take the trail less traveled. Trust me, it will make all the difference. Instead of heading up Mount Dickerman, hit Perry Creek. Instead of hiking in the Hoh Rainforest, where you'll likely have to wait in line to reach the trailhead, check out the historic Snider-Jackson Traverse connecting the Hoh to the Bogachiel rainforest and experience this incredible area in solitude!

If you've grown bored with the familiar, get out of your comfort

zone and try something completely different. Try scrambling (trained and prepared, of course) or following routes. Start discovering trails lacking lots of beta (and leave a trip report when you're done). You may find yourself alone on a spectacular trail and wonder why no one else is hiking it.

Instead of hiking the trail, take a break and consider working on it! Join a trail work party and give back. You'll take pride in your hard work and gain much satisfaction seeing your fellow hikers' appreciation.

Change your mode of travel

Who says trails are just for hiking? Give your hiking a break and go for a trail run. Many trails are open to bikes and horses — go for a ride! When it's snowy, explore by snowshoe or skis. Check out our state's water trails via canoe, kayak or paddleboard. You may end up with a whole new passion or return to hiking with a different appreciation — or hopefully, both!

Change your mood

Maybe it's time to take a break from trails. Let your body rest and recover. Eschew the trails during the wet and cold months, and curl up on the couch with a hot drink and read about trails and hiking. Let absence make your heart grow fonder. In due time, you'll be itching to hit the trail once again — likely with a new zest, vigor and love for hiking and being outdoors.

And lastly, I have found that hiking is one of the best ways for me to escape burnout in other areas of my life — particularly work. Mixing up my routines by being on the trail always rejuvenates me for life's challenges. ■



Your Legacy for Trails

You know the incredible benefits that trails have brought to your own life. Imagine if you could help ensure Trails for Everyone, Forever. You can when you include WTA in your will.

It's never too soon to start planning your legacy for the things you value most. WTA's website offers resources to help you get started on including WTA in your will, as well as more information about other ways to create a lasting impact, including IRA charitable rollovers, charitable gift annuities and remainder trusts, gifts of real estate and more.

Help secure your vision for the future and join the Legacy Circle today.

To learn more, visit wta.org/legacy or contact Andrea Michelbach at amichelbach@wta.org.

Photo by Abir Saha





Subtle signs

Winter is the ideal time to slow down and look for the subtle signs of wildlife on trail. Here are some tips to help you get started.



By Jack Shaw

Seeing wildlife in their natural environment is one of the great joys of hiking. Even if you never see them, you can see signs of the creatures you're sharing the trail with. Learning to watch for such signs can make you more aware of your surroundings and help you find a new appreciation of the natural world.

Recognizing signs of nearby animals requires you to be mindful and observant. If you're hiking with children, it's a great way to connect them to the outdoors. Once they know the basics, you can let them explore and supervise while they search.

Tracks

Tracks are among the most recognizable signs of nearby wildlife — and may be easier to spot in the snow or on muddy ground. Here are some clues to help you identify animal tracks:

Toes: Take note of their number, positions and claws. Mountain goat tracks, for example, show two cloven toes. Bighorn sheep tracks appear similar, but with larger and deeper imprints.

Stride pattern: Prints can be close or wide, straight or meandering. Hopping animals like hares can be recognized by tracks that move side by side, while trotting canines will place their back foot on or near where their front foot left off.

Size: A ruler is a valuable tool when identifying tracks with common features. Bobcats have prints very similar to mountain lions but at about half the size — 2 inches versus 4 inches.

Location: Where you find a print, and how it relates to other prints, can give you clues to what was going on. For example, finding snowshoe hare prints close to lynx probably means the cat was on the hunt. If you widely spaced tracks, it most likely means the animals were moving quickly.

Droppings

Droppings can also tell you a lot about what wildlife is nearby. Here's another place to break out the handy-dandy ruler. You'll also need a pair of gloves.

Placement: If it's near a tree, it's likely to be an animal that climbs, like a squirrel.



A coyote print. Snow makes it easy to watch for tracks.

Conversely, big cats often bury their scat.

Size: If the scat is only an inch long, you can assume it didn't come from a bear. If it's very small, you know you are likely dealing with a squirrel or chipmunk.

Shape: Cat poop tends to be pointed on each end. Deer or elk poop is often in pellets. Coyote scat has longer tapers and irregular shapes.

What's inside: If you see bones or fur, you're looking at the poop of a carnivore or an omnivore. The poop of herbivores is often grassy and breaks apart easily.

Marks on trees

Animals sometimes rub against a tree, leaving a sign behind. Examining the size and extent of these rubbings helps you recognize what kinds of local wildlife you may have nearby.

You might find soft bits of fur clinging to tree limbs. How high are they on the tree? Low clumps might indicate a raccoon, but higher ones can be deer. Examining the surrounding area can provide valuable intel about where the creature came from and where it is heading. Color and texture can help you guess what you might be seeing

Bear rubbings and scratch marks are often easy to spot — they're large and remove a considerable amount of bark.

You can also watch for signs of beaver — if you find gnawed trees or sticks, it's likely a beaver lives nearby.

Jack Shaw is the Outdoors editor for Modded Magazine and a regular contributor for Trekaroo and Duluth Pack. An avid outdoorsman, he frequently retreats into nature to explore his environment and encourages others to do the same.

Learn more

These tips will get you started on your voyage to notice more about the natural world. If you'd like to take it to the next level, here are some good resources to help. You can also find more photos and tips with this story at wta.org/tracking.

iNaturalist: A free app to help identify many plants, animals and insects.

inaturalist.org

WildTrack: A free app to help identify animal tracks. wildtrack.org

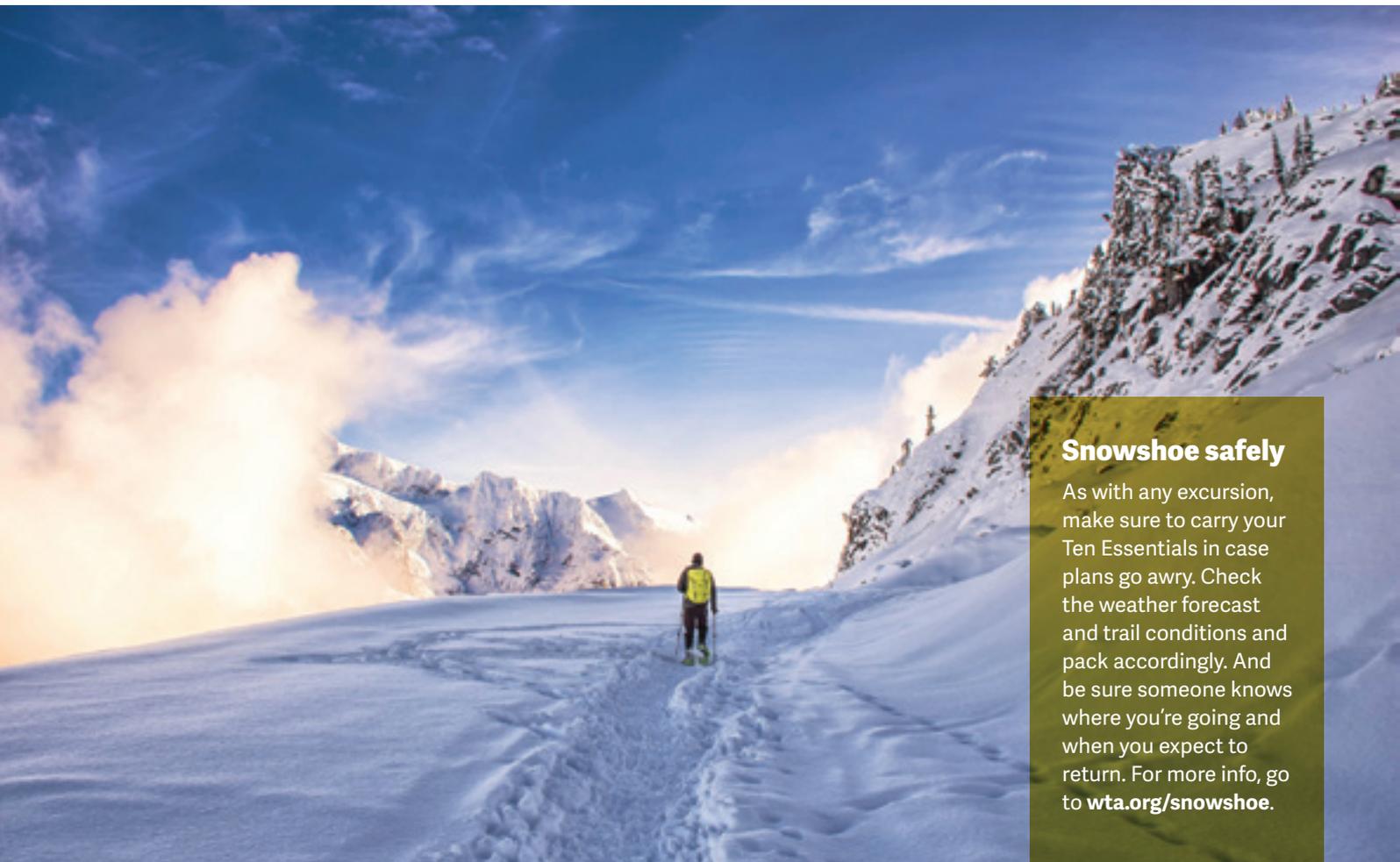
Feather Atlas: An online tool to help identify feathers.

fws.gov/lab/featheratlas

Books

A number of fabulous field guides are available. A few options:

- "Wildlife of the Pacific Northwest: Tracking and Identifying Mammals, Birds, Reptiles, Amphibians and Invertebrates," by David Moskowitz
- "Field Guide to the Cascades and Olympics," by Rob Sandelin and Stephen R. Whitney
- "Peterson Field Guide to Animal Tracks," by Olaus Johan Murie and Mark Elbroch
- The National Audubon Society offers a variety of field guides, including one for mammals, which has a key to help ID footprints.
- For a quick reference, look for the folding, laminated pocket guides that can be found in bookstores or park gift shops. They cover a huge range of subjects.



Snowshoe safely

As with any excursion, make sure to carry your Ten Essentials in case plans go awry. Check the weather forecast and trail conditions and pack accordingly. And be sure someone knows where you're going and when you expect to return. For more info, go to wta.org/snowshoe.

Go Play in the Snow

Snowshoes open up a whole new world in winter — here's what you need to know to pick a pair.

By **Sandra Saathoff**

Once upon a time, I was a three-season hiker. I yearned for spring melt-off, when I could get back to cruising the trails before another round of winter. Then, a friend let me borrow a pair of snowshoes and introduced me to what I now fondly refer to as “winter hiking.” Snowshoes have turned me into a four-season hiker. If you haven't tried them yet, maybe they'll help you get outside more this winter!

The oldest known snowshoes, found in Central Asia, date back 4,000 years.

Indigenous people of North America — such as the Algonquin, Coeur d'Alene and Cree — developed the snowshoes we know today, honing designs to suit their environments. While traditional snowshoes were often made from wood and rawhide, today's adaptations make use of lightweight materials — aluminum, plastic and synthetic fabrics — and ergonomic designs, making snowshoes more accessible and efficient.

Types of snowshoes

Snowshoes come in almost as many varieties as there are hikers.

Recreational: Designed for casual walking on snowy flat or rolling terrain, these are user-friendly and fairly affordable.

Backcountry: Built for off-trail exploration in deep snow and steep terrain, these feature aggressive crampons built for traction.

Racing: Some people like to compete. These snowshoes are lightweight and streamlined for speed.

Anatomy of a snowshoe

The core principle behind snowshoes is to distribute the weight of the user over a larger surface area, which prevents them from sinking (too far) into the snow.

Frame: The outside of the snowshoe, designed to provide structure and define the area over which the weight will be distributed.

Decking: The surface material that supports the user — generally a fabric of some kind.

Bindings: These secure the snowshoe to the user's boots.

Crampons: The all-important metal spikes or teeth that provide underside traction for use on packed or icy snow.

Heel lifts: Some snowshoes come with a hinged metal structure that can be

engaged when traveling uphill. This decreases the angle the user's legs need to flex by lifting the heel, making uphill travel a bit easier.

Choosing and fitting snowshoes

So many options! Once you've decided what kind of snowshoer you want to be — for instance, recreational — it's time to choose your tools. There are many options, with pricing anywhere between \$80 and \$400. Here are some questions to consider if you're looking to buy a pair of snowshoes.

Bindings: Is a ratcheting binding versus a snapping or strapping system easier for you to get into and out of?

Decking: Do you prefer a firmer decking for better snow flotation in deep snow or a softer one that is easier to hike in?

Shape: Would you like the better flotation of a rounder shape or a more oblong shape for a more natural stride? (Also, note that snowshoes with a pointier rear shape seem more prone to kicking snow in the faces of those behind the wearer — something that can be annoying for a travel buddy.)

Traction: What sort of terrain will you be traveling? Do you prefer more or less aggressive traction?

If you're unsure on any of these questions, try borrowing or renting a pair and see what you like and don't like before making a purchase. Ideally, a successful pairing will make snow hiking fun, not force you to relearn to walk.

Sizing

If you're a larger person or will be carrying a heavy pack, larger snowshoes will give you more flotation. If you're smaller or carrying less weight, you can probably go with smaller snowshoes. Snow types also matter — lighter snow will require more flotation, heavier snow will require less. Think about the conditions you'll most likely use them in. Just make sure you can get a secure fit that keeps the snowshoe in place without being so tight that they make your feet go numb.



Other helpful gear

Footwear: Having waterproof boots and a good pair of warm socks is important for foot comfort and safety. You don't have to go out and buy a new pair of boots, though. I have a pair of summer hiking boots that work just fine. Even hiking boots that have worn traction can be repurposed, as the snowshoes provide their own traction.

Poles: These are used for balance and to take some of the strain off the knees when climbing or descending. You may be able to use poles you already have. Some hiking poles come with snow baskets, so the poles don't sink into the snow. I have also repurposed my downhill ski poles for snowshoeing — they work quite well.

Gaiters: Gaiters keep the snow out of your boots, adding warmth and comfort in deeper snow and colder conditions.

Layers: Snowshoeing is a sweaty activity. Layers are important so you can manage heat while working hard or taking a break. Bringing an extra pair of gloves for the way back to the car has made my life better many times.

Using snowshoes

To start, make sure you have a snug fit and then find a nice, flat spot to practice walking around. A slightly wider stance than normal may be

necessary. Try out shorter and longer strides. When traveling uphill, dig the balls of your feet in to engage the traction. On downhills, keep your weight back and use the heel traction for control.

You may also wish to start on well-used trails where the snow is already packed, rather than heading right out into deep snow, which requires more effort.

Snowshoeing can be strenuous. Until you're used to it, consider taking a pair of traction devices so you can begin a hike on packed snow and swap into snowshoes for the second half of the trek or when you get to softer snow.

Cleaning and storage

Snowshoes will last longer if you take care of them. Remove the snow, ice and debris after use. Store them in a cool, dry place away from sunlight. Check for damage before and after each outing.

Snowshoeing offers a unique way to explore winter landscapes, combining physical exercise with the tranquility of nature. Whether you're a casual hiker or an adventurous backcountry explorer, the right pair of snowshoes can open up a world of snowy adventure. And you'll already be in shape for spring hiking season! Winter is right around the corner — will I see you out there?

Finding joy outside

Winter Adventures for Everyone

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.



Pleasant Valley Snowshoe

Yakima

Walk as far as you like up-valley on this moderate snowshoe. Enterprising hikers may consider making this a thru-hike.

By Anna Roth

Beginning from the Hells Crossing trailhead, find a snowshoe trail that follows the American River for a peaceful stroll that you can make as long as you like. You can even make a 10-mile thru-hike and end at Lodgepole Campground.

Start at the Hells Crossing Sno-Park, where an established snowshoe trail follows the southeast banks of the American River. This trail meanders through a quiet forest. It's a stark landscape through a former burn where you can hear only the river rushing. Blue diamonds mark your route through this rolling terrain. There is a groomed ski trail on the north side of the river. Please note that in this trail system, snowshoers and dogs are not allowed on the groomed ski trails.

About 4.5 miles from the trailhead, arrive at a crossing of Kettle Creek and a connection with the Pleasant Valley Sno-Park. You can make this your turnaround point, continue another 3.5 miles to another junction with the road, or go the full 9.9 miles to the Lodgepole Campground.

Tip: Depending on the snowpack, this trail may require snowshoes or it might be hikable in hiking boots and gaiters. Check trip reports before heading out to know what you'll need.

TRAIL DETAILS

Distance: 9 miles roundtrip

Elevation gain: 160 feet

Highest point: 3,250 feet

Permit: Sno-park pass

Dogs: Leashed

Trailhead: From Yakima, drive west on Highway 12 for 17.5 miles. Continue onto Highway 410 west for 32.8 miles to the Hells Crossing Sno-Park.

NEARBY HIKES

Crow Creek Snowshoe: This snowshoe track is intermediate to advanced and starts from the Crow Creek Sno-Park. (8.5 miles one way, 2,300 feet of elevation gain)

Rock Creek Snowshoe: Find miles of groomed trails that connect Lower Rock Creek to Upper Rock Creek and offer further exploration in this area. Cross-country skiers or snowshoers can enjoy the miles of trail with a moderate grade. (10 miles of trails, 2,500 feet of elevation gain)

Photo by trip reporter Terry Hikes



Sullivan Creek and South Mill Pond

Selkirk Range

Enjoy an easy hike through a shady forest in an uncrowded corner of the state. Check out the progress of habitat restoration in the valley where Sullivan Creek was formerly dammed.

By Mary Hartman

For about 100 years, a dam impounded Sullivan Creek, creating Mill Pond. You might still see the pond on topo maps, but the dam was removed in 2017, and habitat restoration followed. The Sullivan Creek Trail winds through the forested hillsides around the former pond.

From the trailhead at the Mill Pond Historic Site, Sullivan Creek Trail leads into a shady, mature forest of cedar, fir and pine, and heads east toward Mill Pond Campground. You'll pass over a footbridge with a small waterfall, and in about a half mile you'll reach the north end of the campground.

Walk the campground road until you arrive at the day-use area (another access point for this trail), then cross the footbridge over Sullivan Creek. The trail ascends a bit, curves to the west, then reaches a junction with a wider trail. If you turned left, you'd end up at Sullivan Lake, so keep right to continue your loop.

About half a mile from the junction, you'll see a fork to the right with a sign for South Mill Pond Trail 550. This out-and-back spur (about a third of a mile each way) takes you down to the valley floor. It's worth the trip to see how the valley is recovering following the removal of the dam and to see the meadows of wildflowers by the creek in the spring.

The main trail continues around the valley, ending up at the former site of the Mill Pond Dam. If you have time, hike the Mill Pond Flume Trail and learn about the history of this site.

Tip: Although the gate to the Mill Pond Historic Site off Sullivan Lake Road (the signed entrance described in the driving directions) is closed in the winter, the trail system is still open and the Forest Service will sometimes plow the pull-off area 0.1 mile to the west of the entrance to the historic site.

Distance: 3 miles roundtrip
Elevation gain: 380 feet
Highest point: 2,618 feet
Permit: None
Dogs: Leashed

Trailhead: Drive north on Highway 31 for 2.1 miles past Metaline Falls. Turn right onto Sullivan Lake Road and continue for 3.3 miles. You'll see a sign for the Mill Pond Historic Site on your right.

Two parking lots are on the upper level near a large picnic shelter and a wheelchair-accessible vault toilet. Kiosks include maps of the trail system and information about the history of the site.

NEARBY HIKES

Sweet Creek Falls Interpretive

Trail: This trail absolutely begs for visitors to pack a picnic lunch and linger. There are multiple picnic tables along the short paved hiking trail leading to the falls. (1 mile roundtrip, 150 feet of elevation gain)

Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge – Mill Butte:

This is a great trail for a family adventure. Wildlife abounds, and the small creek and ponderosa forest provide plenty of distraction for little ones. (4.5 miles roundtrip, 600 feet of elevation gain)



Take Transit

Wheelchair Friendly

Big Rock Garden Park

Bellingham

Immerse yourself in the dozens of unique sculptures at a peaceful hiking experience just minutes away from downtown Bellingham.

By PJ Heusted

Hiking through Big Rock Garden Park is not about power hiking nor looking for expansive views. Instead, the trail invites visitors to meander past the several dozen permanent sculptures that decorate the landscape. The trail consists of one perimeter loop with a smaller connecting trails that allow the hiker to wander near the sculptures in whatever order they desire.

The trail through the park is wide and well-graded gravel that provides access for users in wheelchairs, depending on comfort with the terrain, and allows for gentle strolling for all. There are a number of memorial benches spread throughout the garden, as well as a small pavilion that provides visitors with a place to pause, sit and take in the calm of the garden. Big Rock Garden Park serves as an outdoor art museum. Some visitors may want to move slowly, soaking in the textures and shapes of each individual piece, while others may find themselves drawn to the general calming atmosphere as they sit in the central pavilion.

Information about the sculptures is available through QR codes within the park, and a full guide can be found on the City of Bellingham's Public Art Collections web page. While the sculptures are the park's main attraction, this small parcel also boasts over 100 species of maple, dozens of native flowering shrubs and numerous towering conifers. This creates a perfect blend of the natural world and stunning sculptures, which is sure to inspire any visitor.

Tip: Bellingham hosts a stellar variety of cafes and locally owned shops in both its downtown and the nearby Fairhaven neighborhood. This local author's favorites include Bistro Estelle, Little Cheerful Cafe, Cafe Rumba or Fairhaven Poke as some of the tastiest spots for food at a variety of price points.

Distance: 1 mile roundtrip

Elevation gain: 60 feet

Highest point: 520 feet

Permit: None

Dog Friendly: No

Trailhead: From I-5, take exit 254 for Iowa St. Follow Iowa St for 0.7 mile before taking a slight left onto Yew St. Continue for 0.5 mile and turn right onto Alabama St. Drive down Alabama St for almost 1 mile and turn left onto Sylvan St. Follow the road for 0.5 mile until the sign for Big Rock Garden, you'll turn right onto Balsam Ln and dead-end at the parking lot.

You can take transit to the garden. The 525 and 540 bus routes run to stops less than a mile walk to the garden. These leave consistently from the Cordata and downtown stations with transfers at other points throughout Bellingham.

NEARBY HIKES

Tennant Lake and Hovander Homestead trails: Enjoy a beautiful stroll through active and diverse wetlands that provide habitat for dozens of bird species, beavers and a variety of amphibians. The park and homestead feature a fragrance garden as well as wheelchair-friendly trails for visitors to enjoy. (5 miles of trails, minimal elevation gain)

Squires Lake Park: This is a starting point for either a gentle, easy walk around the lake — once you've made the quick climb from the parking lot — or a continued exploration of the Alger Alps and trail. (2 miles roundtrip, 200 feet of elevation gain)

Photo by PJ Heusted



Take Transit

**Wheelchair
Friendly**

Larry Scott Trail

Olympic Peninsula

Enjoy a gentle amble through forest — with a dash of ravine, wetland and pasture — and on to sweeping views of Port Townsend Bay on a multiuse trail that gently eases hikers, cyclists and equestrians down to the waterfront.

By Kim Huntress-Inskeep

Opened in 1998, the trail is part of the Pacific Northwest Trail and is the easternmost, and oldest, section of the Olympic Discovery Trail (ODT). It commemorates Larry Scott, the conservation steward and co-founder of the Peninsula Trails Coalition, who championed the development of the ODT.

From the Milo Curry trailhead, the trail rises gently from the clearing, and after passing some private properties, a ravine descends on the left, a wetland on the right. Ravens and pileated woodpeckers can sometimes be heard. Some domestic animals can be spotted, including horses (as a sign along the trail warns, don't feed them fingers — or anything else) in pastures along the trail. Mixed forest and madrona punctuate the pastures, as do signs of the nearby urban world when the trail briefly runs alongside Highway 20.

Around mile 3, cross under Highway 20 near Jacob Miller Road, the trail becomes asphalt for a bit before returning you to the forest. In another mile or so, the paper mill on the right signals that you are approaching the waterfront (on some days, the mill's telltale aroma will greet you before you see it). Shortly, leave the heavy industry behind as the waterfront emerges on the horizon. Check out a helpful pictorial guide to both native and invasive species posted near the western trailhead, courtesy of the Washington Native Plant Society.

The trail is hard-packed and about 10 feet wide in most places. Wheelchair users should know that grades in excess of 5% run for several hundred feet near the 2- and 4-mile markers. The trail crosses a few low-traffic roads, with generally consistent signage. All trailheads — Port Townsend waterfront, Cape George and Milo Curry — have restrooms. Bring sufficient water as there are no sources on the trail.

Tip: The near-countless charms of Port Townsend include Water Street's Better Living Through Coffee or Admiralty Fine Foods for refreshment, both of which overlook the bay.

Distance: 7.3 miles one way
Elevation gain: 342 feet
Highest point: 270 feet
Permit: None
Dogs: Leashed

Trailhead: From the Port Townsend ferry dock, head west on Water St for 1 mile as it becomes Sims Way. Turn left onto Haines Place and drive straight to the water, where there is parking.

NEARBY HIKES

North Beach County Park to McCurdy Point: An out-and-back shoreline hike along the Strait of Juan de Fuca offering frequent peeks at wildlife overhead and on the water. Most of the elevation change is at the North Beach trailhead. (6 miles roundtrip, 800 feet of elevation gain)

Miller Peninsula-Thompson Spit: Wander through woods, water and ravines with options to extend the loop into miles more on the state park property or enjoy some solitude on the beach with a view of Protection Island. (6.5 miles roundtrip, 880 feet of elevation gain)



Scarborough Hill

Fort Columbia State Park

Climb to the top of a low peak on the Washington side of the Columbia River, then visit a historic fort, complete with gun battery and old buildings available to rent.

By Anna Roth

From the upper parking area high above the historic buildings, head up the grassy trail, really an old road. It's a bit steep, but you'll enjoy views of Astoria and the mouth of the Columbia River as you chug your way up the switchbacks to a junction about half a mile from the trailhead.

Here, you can take either the Scarborough Trail (left) or the old road (to the right). It's a loop, so consider taking the steeper Scarborough Trail on the way up; you can enjoy the more forgiving road on the way down. Of course, if it's been raining, the road will be more muddy and slippery, so you might want to hike up that and enjoy the more rugged Scarborough Trail on the way down.

Whichever way you decide to go, you'll enjoy both aspects of this little hill. The narrow trail weaves through wilder forest, dense with hemlocks and alders, while the old road provides a wider path to share with friends and better views.

At the summit, it's possible to hike another half mile on the "Summit Trail," but it's just an extension of the road, quite boggy, and there are lots of blowdowns to navigate. Simply doing the loop will give you the best that Scarborough Hill has to offer.

Tip: After you head back down, take a casual tour of the historic buildings and gun battery at this old fort — one of three that protected the mouth of the Columbia.

Distance: 2.8 miles roundtrip
Elevation gain: 630 feet
Highest point: 767 feet
Permit: Discover Pass
Map: go.wta.org/FortColumbiaMap
Dogs: Leashed

Trailhead: From Kelso, take the Ocean Beach Hwy to the tiny town of Naselle. Here, make a left onto Highway 401, driving for 12 miles to a junction of Hwy 101, where a left turn would take you over the Astoria Bridge. Instead, drive straight through this intersection, continuing another mile west on Hwy 101 to the turnoff for Fort Columbia State Park.

The parking area for Scarborough Hill is above the historic buildings. Drive through the fort and up the hill to a grassy, graveled parking area that can fit about eight cars.

NEARBY HIKES

Willapa National Wildlife Refuge – Art Walk:

This short hike with a wheelchair-friendly boardwalk is packed with interpretive signage and lovely art installations that will keep hikers of all ages entertained. (0.75 mile roundtrip, 200 feet of elevation gain)

Cape Disappointment State Park –

Coastal Forest Loop: A lesser-known trail at Cape Disappointment, this hike offers a chance to experience the signature environment of this area. (1.4 miles roundtrip, 260 feet of elevation gain)

Photo by trip reporter Yohi.



McMicken Island

Hood Canal

There are no bridges to little McMicken Island in Case Inlet. No ferry service either. But you don't need a boat to visit. You can hike to this island which lies about 0.2 mile off of the eastern shore of Harstine Island if you time it right. When the tide is low, a tombolo (a sandbar connecting an island to the mainland — or, in this case, another island) is exposed, allowing you foot access to the island.

By Craig Romano

Begin your hike from Harstine Island State Park, taking the Beach Loop Trail descending into a ravine graced with big cedars and firs. Emerge on a deserted beach, catching a view of McMicken Island set against the backdrop of Mount Rainier. If the tide is low, a wide, easy-to-walk beach awaits your footprints.

Walk south on this beach for more than a mile. The entire way is on public tidelands, but there's a parcel of private property located between two large state park properties abutting the shoreline. Respect posted private property. The tombolo is pretty distinctive during low tides. It is fairly wide and raised several feet above inlet waters. In high tides, it's completely submerged, although breaking waves will help you locate its position.

Once across the 0.2-mile sandy strip, reach McMicken Island. All of the little island, except for a small fenced parcel with a couple of cabins, is state park property. The private holding belongs to the family that once owned the entire island. Please keep out of it.

A handful of rare Garry oaks grow near a small picnic area in a grassy opening. Look for a small nature trail near a composting toilet at the eastern edge of the field. Hike it a half mile through towering firs and madronas to blufftop views on the eastern end of the island.

Be sure to explore the island's rocky tidal flats too, checking out the large erratics scattered about. Enjoy your McMicken wanderings — just be sure to keep track of the time and incoming tide so you don't get trapped.

Tip: This hike is only possible in low tides. Consult tide tables and plan accordingly.

Trails Less Traveled
with **Craig Romano**

Distance: 4 miles roundtrip
Elevation gain: 150 feet
Highest point: 135 feet
Book: "Urban Trails Olympia"
(Mountaineers Books)

Permit:

Discover Pass

Dogs: Leashed

Trailhead:

From Shelton, follow Hwy 3 east for 11 miles and turn right onto Pickering Road. After 3.3 miles, bear left onto Harstine Bridge Road and turn left on North Island Drive upon reaching Harstine Island. After 3 miles, turn right onto East Harstine Island Road. Drive 1 mile and turn left onto Yates Road. Continue 0.9 mile and turn right into Harstine Island State Park. You'll reach the trailhead parking lot in 0.2 mile.



Photo by Craig Romano

A JOYFUL THANK YOU

You help make Washington Trails Association's year-round work possible — helping hikers, and everyone who loves the outdoors, get out on trail. Thank you for being part of our community. And thank you for continuing to support our work into the new year. From everyone at WTA, we wish you happy hiking!

PHOTO BY SONYA TAN



Anyone can be an advocate.

HIKER RALLY DAY

MARCH 2025

Join fellow hikers and WTA to ask your state representatives for the support trails need.

Learn – Attend a training on current topics for trails and how to engage with legislators.

Share – Share your trail experiences.

Protect – Be part of big wins for Washington's public lands.

Have fun – Connect with fellow hikers who share your love for the outdoors.

Sign up and be the first to receive an invite at wta.org/rally

