



Finding Lost Pass

Capturing images and memories on a three-day journey into Olympic National Park

Set deep within the wilderness, Lost Pass is one of Olympic National Park's true back-country gems. This pass serves as a gateway to some of the most beautiful high-country meadows in the Olympics. In season, flowers blanket this pass and ensuing basin at the headwaters of the Lost River, offering an intoxicating fragrance to be savored. Marmots whistle amongst the flowers and deer wander aimlessly through the meadows. Keep an eye out for bears! There is no easy approach to this remote area high above the Dosewallips River, so anyone willing to expend the effort is rewarded with relative solitude on top of the scenic pleasure and abundant wildlife.

Don Geyer

Don is a professional photographer and author of the book *Mount Rainier: A Photographer's Guide to Mount Rainier National Park*.

Hikers may approach this area by several means, via trail and high routes—but none are short. One could sit in front of a map and use his or her imagination to put a creative multi-day trip together from Obstruction Point, Deer Park, Dungeness Forks, and more. But the easiest (relatively speaking) and most direct route is from the Dosewallips – though one must consider the extra 5.5 miles each way due to the road washout. (Hint: A bike is your friend.)

I arrived at the washout on the Dosewallips River Road at half past two in the afternoon, hoping to jump-start an extended three-day trip up into Lost Basin. It had already been a long day for me. I had spent my morning photographing flowers in another popular national park, then made the long drive over to the peninsula. My plan was to get far enough up the Dosewallips to put me in striking distance of Lost Basin the next day. Under clear skies, I circumvented the washout on the lower trail and set off up the remainder of road.

At 4 p.m., I arrived at the trailhead at Muscott Flat, having pushed my bike the majority of the distance due to the heavy pack (camera gear isn't light!) and steepness of the road. The payoff, of course, would be on the return trip. After securing my bike, I hiked in 3.5 miles to Slide Creek Camp and set up camp for the evening, taking pause at Cache Creek along the way for some photography. At Cache Creek, a beautiful small cascade is nicely framed by vine maple to each side and moss-covered rocks in the creekbed. Photographers should bring a polarizing filter to add saturation to the

green colors under neutral, even light. Other creek crossings along the Dosewallips River Trail offer similar photo possibilities.

As the sun set, I settled into camp and noticed a couple of clouds drifting overhead. Instantly, I became jealous of anyone in the high country on this particular evening, as they were likely witnessing a spectacular sunset. No photographer wishes to be stuck under a forest canopy at sunrise or sunset! The clouds turned a brilliant pink in the evening sky. Beyond a great sunset, these clouds likely confirmed the predicted weather change for the next morning.

Sure enough, it began to drizzle on my bivy sack around 5 a.m. I broke camp just after 7 a.m. and headed out through the mist. Fortunately, the mist was short-lived; I had hiked only a few miles before it stopped.

At the Gray Wolf Pass junction, I took in an amazing flower show, with columbine, lupine, paintbrush, foxglove, aster, cow parsnip and many more all contributing to the grandeur. The trail here can be quite overgrown and even hard to follow in stretches. It can also be lonesome—not a soul was camped at Dose Meadows during my visit, nor at any of the sites along the way.

The trail to Lost Pass leaves the main fork of the Dosewallips River Trail at 12.6 miles, at the beginning of Dose Meadows. In less than a mile, you'll gain 1,100 feet. But arriving at the flower-strewn pass and seeing the views beyond into Lost Basin makes the steepness well worth your while. Lost Basin comprises rolling green meadows. Large and scenic, this basin demands that you take a break to drink it all in before descending the final short distance to camp.

I arrived at Three Sons Camp at half past two and found it vacant. This camp offers three small sites in close proximity to the trail, amidst a small grove of subalpine trees. Two

nearby creeks provide drinking water. Alternatively, one can set a cross-country camp higher in the basin, but your ankles need to be aware of the minefield of undetectable marmot holes scattered throughout the basin. The upper basin can also be heavily ridden with mosquitoes as a result of the moist, swampy ground.

Shortly after setting up camp, I saw my first person of the day, a hiker passing through en route to Dose Meadows from Cameron Creek. His footsteps were followed a short time later by a couple with the same evening destina-

tion, who eventually would cross over Hayden Pass, over Low Divide and exit via the Quinault—all of it scenic country that I have enjoyed on separate trips.

After dinner, I ventured back up toward Lost Pass to photograph the flowers and sunset. Lupine and paintbrush appeared in profuse numbers, making it impossible to keep away. Sentinel Peak towers above Lost Pass and serves as nice subject matter to frame above the flowers. To the east, Mount Deception dominates the skyline in an impressive fashion that also serves the photographer well. Wide-angle and mid-range telephoto lenses work well here, and two- and three-stop split neutral density

filters will help to bridge the contrast between sky and meadows.

Just before sunset, I spotted a sow and her two cubs up on the lower slopes of Lost Peak. The cubs chased and tackled one another, such fun to watch in the dimming light. Though my perch was quite far away, the mother eventually noticed me, gathered her cubs in and fled around to the southeastern flanks of the mountain. Still, I felt lucky to witness the sight of the playful juveniles, and I replayed the memory over in my head the rest of the evening.

The next morning, I headed up to Cameron Pass and walked the ridge west to a prominent viewpoint at 6,650 feet. Here I enjoyed an



You'll have plenty of chances to shoot falling water like this sweet Cache Creek cascade.

Trip Details

For the hiker willing to endure the rigors of getting there, Lost Pass makes an excellent destination for a three- to four-day trip along the Dosewallips River.

Length:

43.4 miles round trip

Elevation gain:

4,500 feet

Add another 4 miles total and 1,000 feet gain to Cameron Pass.

Hikers wishing to spread the miles out over more days can easily do so, as there are numerous camps all along the Dosewallips River Trail that make for convenient stopovers.

Hikers may also add side trips farther up the Dosewallips River Trail. From the Lost Pass Trail junction, it's 1.7 miles (one way) to reach the beautiful flower meadows of Thousand Acre Meadows or 2.6 miles (one way) to reach the higher, panoramic views of Hayden Pass.

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excellent view stretching from Mount Olympus, the Bailey Range and Mount Anderson down to Cameron Basin. I highly recommend this short side trip. At 6,500 feet, Cameron Pass and vicinity are quite barren, a stark contrast to the meadows of Lost Pass and Lost Basin.

I then descended into Cameron Basin. As the trail down is steep and loose, one must take care. Trekking poles would have been nice to have. The area holds your interest, however, and keeps your mind and senses busy. The upper basin continues to be barren, while meadows begin appearing amongst the rock in the lower basin. Lupine, paintbrush and other flowers line the creeks that are tumbling down, winding their way to the ocean, and I managed to catch these flowers at their peak form in the lower basin. At the lip of the basin, near Cameron Basin Camp, a beautiful waterfall is framed with pink heather as it cascades through the rocks. Beyond this point, the trail descends 1,200 feet through lush undergrowth to a junction with the Grand Pass Trail, so there is no need to continue further. Cameron Basin would be fun to photograph under filtered light.

As I returned to Cameron Pass, I noticed a sparkle in the horizon to the north. Could it be? The sun's reflection off cars parked at the Obstruction Point parking lot many ridges away? Indeed, the map confirmed it. Here I was, deep into the heart of the Olympics, enjoying complete solitude in such a magnificent setting after much sweat and toil, and I could see parked cars that were actually at a higher elevation than I was. Well, shoot!

I returned to camp and napped for a few hours. When I awoke, clouds were beginning to claim the sky. I felt a sense of disappointment settling in, as I had scouted several compositions to photograph Lost Basin and Lost Peak earlier in the day. As I headed back up to Cameron Pass around 6 p.m., a white sheet had begun to roll up some of the valleys. Soon, the Dosewallips River Valley was consumed, as were Sentinel Peak and Thousand Acre Meadows, which had been visible over Lost Pass not so long before. I arrived at Cameron Pass with complete cloud cover above me and, at times, around me. Soon, clouds filled Cameron Basin. I turned on my weather radio to hear the forecast for the Olympic Mountains: "Tonight through Thursday, clear ..." Interesting indeed! I smiled as I realized the possibility of a dramatic evening with intense lighting for photography.

Then, as luck would have it, magic happened. At 8 p.m., the clouds began to break and a magnificent show began. The sun emerged as a brilliant red orb glowing through slowly dissolving clouds, seemingly hovering low in the sky. The ridge between Lost Pass and Mount Claywood turned fiery red above the nearly gold meadows along the south slopes of Cameron Pass. As the sun fell lower, its rays were diffused by the clouds and deflected by the rolling fog. All around me, the fog took on a brilliant magenta hue. I shot this incredible sunset with a wide-angle lens to capture the amazing casting of color upon the basin.

I descended back to camp in a dream state, with a permanent smile on my face. Such

**Sunset over
Cameron Pass in the
Olympics.**

**You don't get
sunsets like this
every night, but it'd
be great if you did.**





A marmot kind enough to strike a pose

evenings in the mountains are indeed magical, and the memories relished for a lifetime.

That night, I experienced my coldest night of the trip, awaking several times to pile on additional layers.

The next morning, I broke camp at 8 a.m. and descended down to Dose Meadows and the Dosewallips Trail, where a lone bear roamed the meadows in the distance, and a happy-to-pose marmot greeted me. I spent some time photographing the marmot and admiring the bear from afar before donning my pack and heading out. I reached the trailhead at half past one. I had run into the lone hiker again at Bear Camp (who was heading back to Deer Park via Gray Wolf Pass), but I didn't see anyone else until I reached the Constance Pass junction.

The bike ride out brought pleasure to my feet as I was carried back to my truck in just forty minutes. Weary hikers shot me looks of envy as they worked their way uphill and I sped by downhill. What a ride!

I have done many extended trips in the Olympic Mountains, including the Bailey Range traverse, the Skyline Trail and several ascents of majestic Mount Olympus. The Lost Pass vicinity remains one of my favorite Olympic destinations, and I hope to return again soon. I recommend you pay it a visit and discover this "Lost" gem as well.♦

Nature on Trail »

Meet the Sooty Grouse

Or, should we say, the wild chickens formerly known as blue grouse *By Alan L. Bauer*

For some, the sight of a squat, brown-feathered, chicken-sized bird walking about in the mountains could appear to be a "wild chicken" sighting. But chickens roaming the Cascades!? Nah! As I'm sure many of you have guessed, these birds are grouse. In Washington, we have ruffed grouse, spruce grouse, blue grouse, and even sharp-tailed and sage grouse in the sage desert lands of Central Washington. Let's take a closer look at one particular species.

City Grouse, Country Grouse

A few years back, during the first week of September, I photographed five blue grouse at 5,350 feet near Tolmie Peak in Mount Rainier National Park. I shared these images with my friend Andy Stepniewski, hands down one of the leading birders in all of the Columbia Basin area and the author of *The Birds of Yakima County*. "Those are really great sooty grouse images," he said.

Sooty grouse? Now, I had thought I was a top-notch birder to immediately know that I was sharing my huckleberries with blue grouse. But I was only half right, and as nature always proves, there is so much more to learn! Blue grouse were enjoying an exciting time in the ornithology world just then. In his response, Andy actually exclaimed, "Stay tuned! This is cutting-edge ornithology!"



A female sooty grouse

In 2006, the American Ornithologists' Union had decided to divide the birds that you and I are accustomed to calling blue grouse into two taxonomic species. In Washington, this divide follows the crest. Those living in the western Cascades are the sooty grouse (*Dendragapus fuliginosus*) and those who inhabit the open terrain east of the Cascade crest now go by the name dusky grouse (*Dendragapus obscurus*).

From Andy, I learned that the primary difference between the two divisions of blue grouse species concerns the tail band features and some minor differences in plumage coloring. The sooty grouse has strong bands of gray in its tail. No wonder I love being a photographer. It is a lifelong biological education about every subject nature has to offer.

More of a Hooter

You've probably heard the drumming noise that ruffed grouse make: whomp-whomp-whomp-whomp. Blue grouse, er—*sooty grouse and dusky grouse*—make an entirely different noise, a clear hoot that is more like the sound an owl or a pigeon would make. Their song has five parts to it, sort of an "Oohhoo-hoo-hoo-oohhoo." As I sat in Rainier's crimson huckleberry meadows, I heard this enchanting call over and over from these fellow huckleberry-lovers. You should have seen their eyes as I tried to talk back with them for half an hour! I may not be able to talk to the animals like Doctor Doolittle, but I certainly appreciate the details of this spectacular place we call home.

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