



Beneath an EVENING SKY

The simple pleasures of camping

When I was a child, family vacations meant camping. My family didn't have the budget for hotel rooms and dinners in restaurants, so when those magic two weeks in July arrived, my father would drag out the family camping paraphernalia. The musty old canvas Army surplus tent – the one with no floor and poles made out of cast iron, the ancient Coleman stove, the special checkered tablecloth that was only used on picnic tables – these and a hundred other doo-dads and gadgets were loaded into the back of our '65 Volkswagen station wagon with great anticipation.

Story and photos by John D'Onofrio





We'd drive down the highway, filled with a sense of freedom and adventure, pulling into a state park campground where we'd set up the tent (if one of those heavy poles fell on you, you'd be a goner), fire up the stove (after much vociferous pumping) and explore the rather domesticated woods of the eastern seaboard. When darkness fell, a campfire would be lit and the evening would settle into a mellow reverie of fireflies and toasted marshmallows.

It was pure bliss.

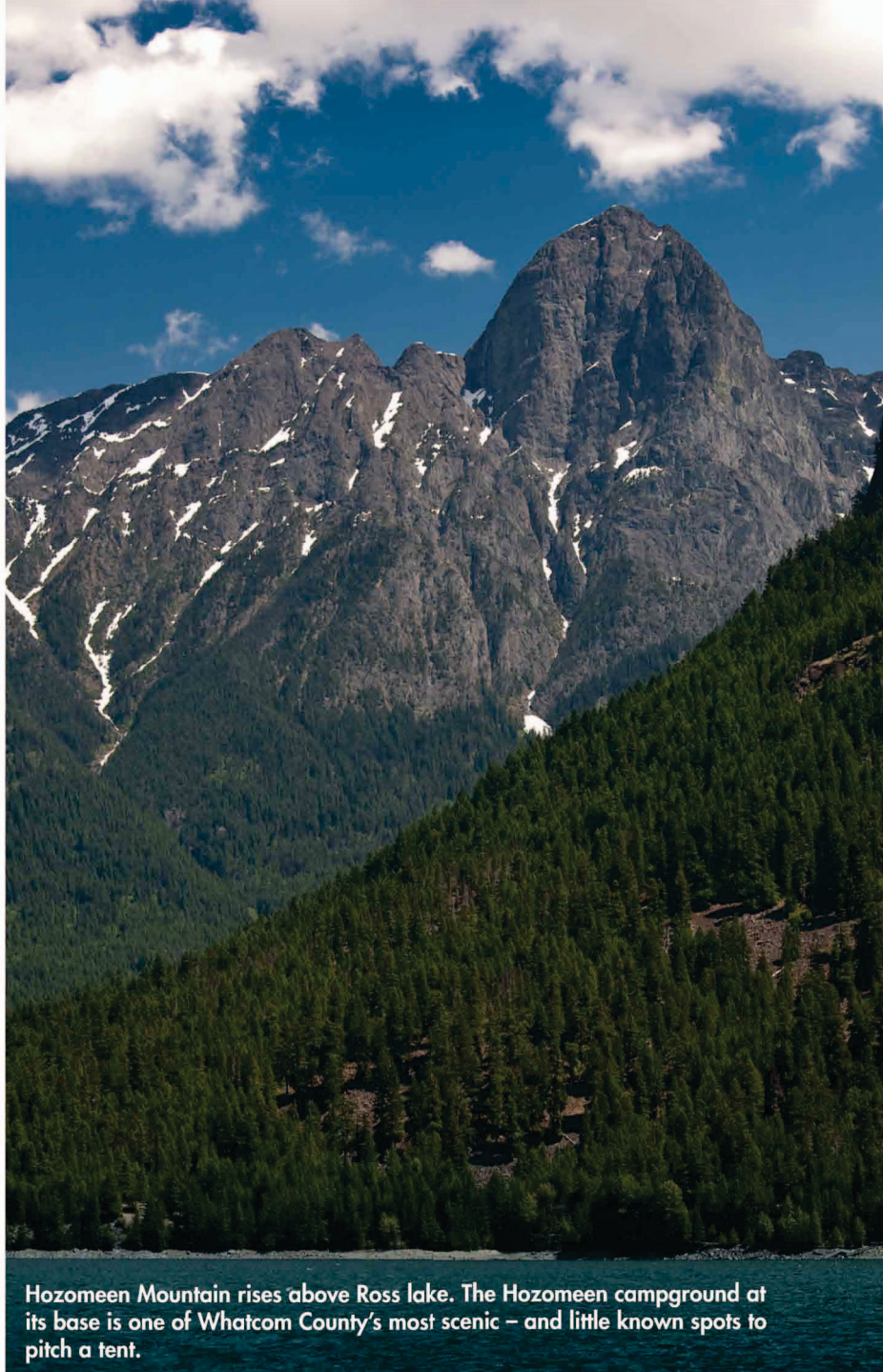
In those days, campgrounds were social gatherings. Temporary neighbors invited each other over for cold drinks or hot chocolate, horseshoes were thrown, friendships were formed – some of them lifelong. The

sun, it seemed, always shined. Which was a good thing because that canvas tent leaked like a sieve.

This was “way back when,” you understand. Before the RV. Sure, you'd see an occasional Airstream trailer, looking like a spaceship from an old sci-fi movie, but they were the exotic exception to the rule.

The camping milieu has changed considerably since those innocent days. But the basic idea remains the same and the family camping trip still possesses the magic of living beneath the open sky, the bonhomie of the fireside, and yes, even the toasted marshmallows (just don't read the ingredients!).

In the Pacific Northwest, camping remains a popular and well-loved pastime and no wonder – we're



Hozomeen Mountain rises above Ross lake. The Hozomeen campground at its base is one of Whatcom County's most scenic – and little known spots to pitch a tent.

surrounded by some of the most beautiful camping spots in the world. You can choose from any number of developed campgrounds that provide fire pits, picnic tables and bathroom facilities or find your own spot, far from the sometimes-crowded “official” campgrounds. Surrounded as we are by National Forest lands, the possibilities are limitless. Unless otherwise noted, camping is permitted anywhere in the National Forests.

Naturally, if you elect to camp outside of a developed campground, you’ll need to be completely self-sufficient. This means that you’ll need to bring your own water and be prepared and familiar with disposing of human waste in an environmentally sound manner. This generally means digging a “cat hole.” Dig your hole at

least 200 feet (about 70 adult paces) from any water, camp, road or trail. Look for an area with deep organic soil and dig a hole six to eight inches deep (you’ll want a small trowel for this). When finished, fill the hole with the displaced soil and cover it with native materials.

Of course, opportunities abound for a more civilized approach by taking up temporary residence in one of the many developed campgrounds in Whatcom County. The next page lists some options that are sure to deliver a memorable experience in the great outdoors without the need for any serious “roughing it.” All offer bathrooms, picnic tables and fire pits.

Hozomeen Campground: 75 sites on the north end of Ross Lake. A real gem, this campground (part of the North Cascades National Park) is accessed from Canada and on the sometimes rough, 40-mile gravel Silver/Skagit Road south of Hope, B.C.

Lake Wenatchee State Park: 197 sites bisected by the Wenatchee River – south park features camping, swimming and horseback riding, and north park is a less developed, forested section. From Hwy 2 at Stevens Pass drive 20.5 miles east, turn north on SR 207.

Larrabee State Park: 79 sites (plus 8 walk/bike-in sites) on Chuckanut Bay. Washington's first state park, Larrabee is located on Chuckanut Drive near the Whatcom/Skagit county line. Tide pools and lots of hiking opportunities on the west side of Chuckanut Mountain.

Kayak Point: 51 sites on a spectacular saltwater beach park located along the shores of picturesque Port Susan. Take exit 202 off I-5 and head west. Arrive in less than 15 minutes. A 300-foot pier extending into Puget Sound is perfect for crabbing and fishing.

Mineral Park: 21 sites situated near the confluence of the North and South Forks of the scenic Cascade River in Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. From Marblemount on Hwy 20, cross the bridge over Skagit River and go east 16 miles to the campground.

Money Creek Campground: 15 sites scattered beneath a towering canopy of old-growth forest are situated near the banks of the South Fork Skykomish River. Bask in the stunning scenery of the northern Cascade Range. Just up Hwy 2 from Index on the south side of the road.

Panorama Point (Baker Lake): 15 sites on Baker Lake, approximately 19.2 miles up the Baker Lake Road from HWY 20. Of the numerous campgrounds at Baker Lake, Panorama Point offers the best views.





Gearing Up

Tent camping has come a long way since my early years in the Army surplus tent. Lightweight nylon tents come equipped with rain flies – and they actually keep the rain out. Models with vestibules provide a space to shed wet clothing or boots before crawling in. A ground cloth beneath the tent will protect the floor. A sheet of visqueen will do the trick.

In the great Northwest, tarps are an essential accoutrement. You can get fancy coated nylon ones that come with poles, but if the weather gets bad you might want the edge of the tarp extending over the campfire, and you'll risk holes from rising sparks. I use plastic tarps with reinforced corners. Combined with a few collapsible poles and some heavy-duty stakes, they are adaptable to all sorts of situations. And duct tape does a pretty good job of patching spark holes.

The Coleman stove hasn't changed that much. These babies are a model of common-sense design and durability. Sure, you might not be able to prepare Chicken Cordon Bleu but, hey, you're camping. And, of course, the tradition of the hot dog cooked on a stick over the fire is still going strong. Try this with some of those "gourmet" organic turkey sausage dogs and you're really living – Bellingham style!

Sleeping bags are, of course, an integral part of the camping experience. Lightweight bags are widely available with insulation made of down or synthetics. A down-filled bag will have to be carefully protected from the rain. Take the temperature ratings with a big grain of salt. A bag rated at 30 degrees might result in some teeth-chattering when the temperature drops that low. As a rule of thumb, I subtract 10 degrees from the manufacturer's rating – thus a bag rated at 30 degrees should keep you reasonably toasty when it's 40.

Sleeping comfort (and warmth) are greatly enhanced by a sleeping pad. The so-called self-inflating type are quite comfy (although in my experience, they don't really self-inflate, you have to blow them up). By using two pads – an inflatable and a closed-cell foam pad – you'll sleep like a baby and be well insulated from the cold, hard ground.

When darkness falls, you'll need light. Flashlights are good but headlamps are better. They allow you to have both hands free to pitch a tent or find that perfect hotdog stick. Today's LED headlamps are super energy efficient; they last a long time on a set of batteries.

If you camp outside of developed campgrounds, a collapsible table comes in handy for cooking and eating. These are widely available at sporting goods stores.

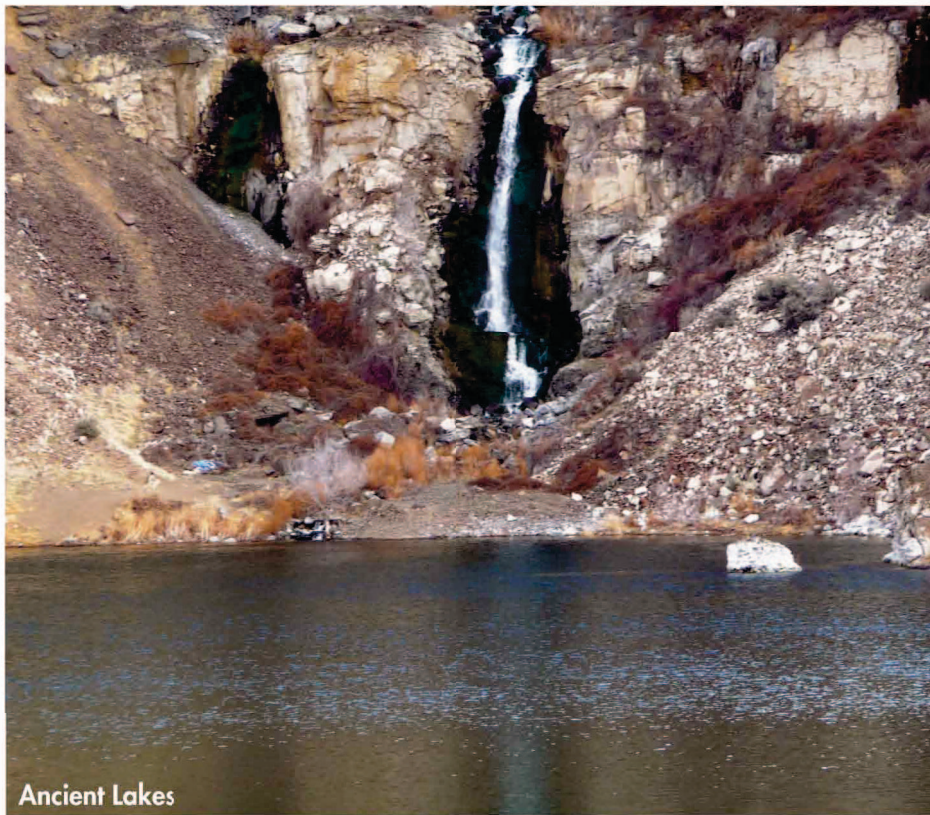


Expansive views await hikers on the ridge above Swakane Canyon.

Hiking Central Washington

By Barry Truman

Central Washington, bleached out and flat in the black and white hike-book photos, is nicely staged in person: walls of simple creek beds fold around you; in spring, flowered ridges go forever. In contrast to our west-side abstention from leaving the comfort of a recognized trail, any place in Central Washington without a standing “Private Property” sign is a trailhead. “That looks good,” is generous planning. Except for poison ivy and rattlesnakes, it’s just a big friendly lava flow. Come, take a walk, at four scenic hikes on the dry side of the mountain.



Ancient Lakes



Ancient Lakes

Ancient Lakes is part of the Quincy Wildlife Recreation Area, a pocket of lakes and rocks that drop off from the surrounding desert like a street artist's 3-D painting. The four-mile round trip through Potholes Coulee is a pleasant sequence of cliffs and benches with desert plant displays unchallenged in the archives of landscape architecture. The trail, briefly flat, wiggles down through a crack in basalt cliffs. At the bottom, a faint trail to the left and up makes a five-minute side trip through a notch with views of Dusty Lake. For Ancient Lakes, keep right, presently reaching the top of a bluff with wide views of the lakes and the waterfalls at their head. Leave time to explore

the easy terrain of this spacious basin. Swallows nearly smother the evening air, doves chase mouthy crows and geese make the biggest racket until the coyotes start howling.

Getting there: Four miles west of the town of Quincy on Highway 28, between mileposts 25 and 26, turn south on U-NW (White Trail Road), which becomes 5-NW. Six miles from Highway 28, turn right on T-NW at a "Public Fishing, Public Hunting" sign. Drive 2 miles to a public restroom and parking area across the road from Burke Lake. Facing west, the Ancient Lakes trailhead is 75 feet to your right in a small camping site.

Swakane Canyon

If your patience with showy wildflowers has run thin, avoid the broad, sage shoulders of the Swakane Wildlife Area, its ridges building northerly from a wrinkle defined by Swakane Creek. Swarms of flowers pepper the open prairie slopes between the pines, colonizing the lower margins of retreating snow, leading up to long, generous easterly looks toward the Columbia. The shading and color is magnificent, even at mid-day. The Swakane area has a healthy herd of mountain sheep, which are easily spotted against the green spring foliage, and Golden

Eagles and other soaring assassins patrol their debatable territories over adjacent rocky canyons.

Getting there: Drive US 97A north from Wenatchee on the west side of the Columbia River just more than 5 miles and turn left at the Swakane Canyon Road. Keep left at a junction (3 miles) and, at 4.5 miles, have pity on your car's suspension by parking in an open canyon floor. Facing north, climb a ridge on your left, sometimes steeply, as far as time allows.



Umatilla Rock

Sun Lakes-Dry Falls State Park's signature ex-waterfall, previously several Niagaras in volume crashing 400 feet from a reservoir that reached Montana, is now in a long time-out. The park's displaced boulders, towers and spires called "erratics," having surfed on glaciers from their frenzied volcanic origins to the desert, are likewise passive. The simple beauty of the park's lakes is sedative.

Umatilla Rock, the 300-foot dorsal fin for some underground monster, is a fitting centerpiece for all this barren desert peace. Around it are trails on which you'll scare up quail and pheasants and walk among the unlikely tall, tilted rocks of Monument Coulee, near the northeast end.

Getting there: From Highway 17, turn easterly into Sun Lakes State Park, about 3 miles south of Dry Falls Junction. At 1.2 miles on the park road, turn left on a road marked for Dry Falls and Deep Lakes and Camp Delaney (gated in winter). Park off the road or turn and drive a short mile to the Umatilla Rock trailhead (just beyond the junction that splits routes to Dry Falls Lake and Camp Delaney). Walk north-easterly on any trail along the east side of the cliffs, eventually reaching the shores of Dry Falls Lake. State park fees and camping charges apply.

Frenchman Coulee

A castle wall of spectacular basalt columns and a great river walk along Wanapum Lake, one of the Columbia River's dam-fashioned wide spots, fills a late-afternoon time-slot just off I-90 between Vantage and George. Take Silica Road westerly from Exit 143 for 0.7 miles to an unmarked road on the left. Follow this road (old U.S. 10) through Frenchman Coulee's high drama to Babcock Bench, stopping off at The Feathers, palisade pillars freckled with helmeted rock climbers, at 2 miles. From a large parking area at 5.3 miles, walk down river on any track until the bank

blocks your passage, looking over a couple of little side canyons on the way. In the last canyon, climb a ridge to a section of old highway, turn right and cruise down the road through basalt cliffs and sand dunes, meeting the river across the from a boat launch at sunset.

Washington Department of Fish and Game Permits required to park, except in the state park. Websites for the fish and game department and the state parks department are wdfw.wa.gov and www.parks.wa.gov respectively.