

Five-Day Camping Trip Eastern Washington

Thurs April 21

Leave at 9, meet Alice Erwin at the Rhododendron Bonsai garden in Federal Way. \$8 admission. Beautiful wooded acres of rhodies & azaleas in bloom, exotic trees, a "stumpery" stuffed with ferns, a field of blue poppies. The bonsai were magical. Many old specimens. They are to trees like dollhouses are to houses, and perhaps I like them so much because they evoke the flights of imagination of miniature worlds. One and a half hours was just the right amount of time.

After lunch at The Antique Sandwich Company near Alice's house in Ruston (the quiche was delicious, but a half portion was too small) we drove east toward mt. Rainier on 512. 161 south goes through South Hill, a hideously ugly and congested strip of fast food joints & plastic storefronts. The worst of modern life. Wondering if hiway 7 is less ugly. South to Morton, then east on 12 through green farms & forests. Stopped at the Cowlitz Ranger Station in Randle to ask about camping. We couldn't remember the name of the place we stayed last time.

Summit Creek CG is two miles north of hiway 12 just east of the hiway 123 junction. There's a sign for it, and you take Forest Service Road 45. The dirt road is very potholed and water scarred. The campground is empty. It's right next to a roaring creek. There's lots of split firewood lying around from all the trees that came down this winter. It's a bit wet, but is burning OK. We arrived about 4:00. A little breezy but pleasant temperature.

We brought a guitar on this trip for the first time, since we are both playing now. It was nice to be able to strum around a campfire.

Pinto beans for dinner, topped with cheese omelette, sour cream, and salsa.

It's nice to get away from the urban noise. We've been living with construction noise on both sides of our house now for months.

Two perfect trilliums are blooming, miraculously surviving the beer & pistol crowd that, judging from the spent cartridges & flattened, fire-blackened cans strewn about, frequent this campground.

Saw a hint of full moon peaking over the ridge in the night.

Grant slept crummy & woke feeling crummy, as often happens on the first night of a trip. He figures it's a form of detoxing. This time, up many times to pee.

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Summit Creek CG:
Site #5 is best.
Continue on road instead
of down into main CG.
View of creek, easy access.

Friday April 22

42° at 7 am and a few minutes of light sprinkles followed by blue sky and the sun trying, and failing, to top the ridge to the south.

Walk 45 minutes up the road along Summit Creek until the road was blocked by snow. Trillium unfurling. This section of road in good shape. Next time try walking up the right fork of the road.

Saw what looked like big cat prints in the snow.

Haven't seen or heard another soul up here. Left about 10 and drove east on hiway 12 across White Pass, 4500'. Stopped at several nice viewpoints (actually two): Palisades, with its spectacular columns of volcanic rock, and mt. Rainier, with views of the Goat Rocks Wilderness area (mt. Rainier was hidden by clouds).

There were huge washouts on this road last winter due to flooding. Two spots are now one-lane roads with automatic traffic signals.

We stopped in Selah ~~for~~ to buy the noodles I forgot to bring, then took an

inadvertently long, but very scenic & agricultural, drive north to the Yakima River Canyon. We arrived at Big Pines BLM recreational site about 1pm and got the last spot on the river. It's warm in the sun but quite cool in the shade, with a stiff breeze. After a very welcome late lunch, Grant took a nap while I played guitar by the river. The hills are a fuzzy olive green. Today we saw clouds of yellow sunflowers & purple lupine.

This is a BLM campground, and has always been free, but they will start charging as of May 15.

Stroganoff for dinner then sit around a fire. It got very windy for a while, so we cooked and ate in the van.

This is a cheek-to-jowl campground, and after the delightful experience last night of having a campground all to ourselves, it's a bit hard to get used to people noises: radios, barking dogs, drunken laughter. We went to bed about 9 and never heard another peep.

Sat. April 23

Up at 6 to birds chirping and 36°. On the road at 6:30, as we want to hike Cowiche Canyon before it gets too warm. Saw a herd of about 10 female(?) mountain goats standing on the highway licking (salt from winter de-icing?). They caused lots of rockfall as they walked up the steep talus slope next to the road. One was a baby.

After a few stops for wood & such we got to the Cowiche Canyon parking lot about 8:15. A cold wind was blowing, roundly defeating the warm sun. But soon we began to peel off the layers as we warmed up from walking. The canyon is gorgeous. The hills are carpeted in blazing yellow sunflowers, ~~and~~ purple lupine & delphinium, and many other wildflowers. The hawthorne & red osier dogwood are in bloom. In fact, just about everything seemed to be in bloom. The three-mile trail crosses the creek now a torrent of spring snowmelt, almost a dozen times. Cliffs of blocky basalt, splotched with neon-yellow lichen, rise on either side. It's wide enough to walk side-by-side, although the gravel is soft if you stray from the worn path. It took us about an hour each way.

On the way back the wind was in our faces & tiresomely intense. We came

upon clumps of people and discovered there was an Earth Day event, with stations for geology, birding, aquatic samples, and more. The place was mobbed, and we were glad we had gone early.

We drove back up the Yakima Canyon and ate lunch at the Umpqua Rec. Area, where a group of teen Boy Scouts was heading off for a hike. It was quite entertaining to listen to their chatter.

Heading north on highway 10 to Cle Elum we saw what appeared to be a group of marmots in a field by the road.

The Cle Elum ranger station was closed, but they a brochure with camping information. We finally found water in the park next door, after striking out at every gas station we'd passed.

Bread at Safeway, meat at Owens Meats, and we were on our way to the Tearaway River Road. Our goal was the Beverly Forest Service CG, but on the way we passed a fabulous dispersed camping site, about two miles up the dirt road.

Dispersed means no water, outhouse, or picnic table, and it's free. We are right next to the roaring North Fork of the Tearaway. The ground is covered with pink, white, & yellow wildflowers, including many small yellow shooting star columbine.

Blue sky, puffy white clouds, pine trees, warm sun, a cool breeze. Paradise! The other two campers are far enough away that we feel all alone.

Arrived about three. Reading, napping, journal, guitar. Nice fire, stroganoff for dinner.

Sunday April 24

37° at 7 am. Light clouds & heavy dew give way to patches of blue. We're at 2800' and there are patches of snow nearby. We drove two more miles up the road to check out the Beverly CG. The road got worse and the CG was snowed in. Also lots of logging in the area. ~~& buildings~~ We saw other free sites along the way, and there is also a free state CG where the paved road ends.

After gas & a freshen-up in the Cle Elum Safeway fuel center (clear; warm; hot water) we headed over Blewett Pass to Leavenworth and the riverfront trail. Even on a Sunday there weren't too many people on the trail. It's a beautiful walk along the river, with views of snow-capped peaks and no sense of being near town. We walked for over an hour, ate lunch, and drove

* Not much to see or do, but the hardware store is a fun hangout with coffee shop & tchotchkas.

up the Chunstick Road to the bucolic town of Plain, nestled in a broad green valley with mountain views. I hadn't been here in 35 years, and Grant probably never.*

Then we continued on to see Lake Wenatchee. It's a large & scenic mountain lake, but the State Park attracts hordes of people, and today there was a bitter cold wind roaring off the lake.

Back toward Leavenworth on highway 2 we drove about 10 miles up the Icicle River Rd. to Bridge Creek CG. It's \$17 a night (we pay half) and the six sites are spectacular: right on the Icicle River with mountain views. The half of the sky that is full of clouds is sprinkling very lightly. The sun is warm but the breeze is cool. We're at about 2100'.

The clouds rolled in and it started sprinkling heavier so we decided to head back to Cle Elum. Took about an hour to get to the free state CG (with nw Forest Pass) about 11 miles up the North Fork Teanaway Road. No rain or wind here and the sun is warmish. Potatoes & eggs for dinner. Chilly after the sun set, so no fire tonight.

This CG is on the river and has pit toilets & port-a-potties.

Monday
~~Sunday~~ April 25

25° at 7 am! Frost on everything.
Cold but beautiful. We started the car
before getting up!

Coyote loping through a frosty field,
a lone turkey crossing the road. You see
more critters when you're up early.

A brief walk on the Iron Horse Trail
westbound from South Cle Elum. Grant
didn't bring enough warm clothes on this
trip. He got a blister from his walking
shoes but forgot to wear his hiking
shoes. So we had to abort our walk.

A rainy drive across the pass and
home at 11:30.