

TRAVEL

Northwest beauty overcomes vacation's setbacks

By Ron Picard
SPECIAL WRITER

I can't remember a vacation where so many things went wrong, at least at the beginning. We met my brother's family in Seattle for two weeks in the Pacific Northwest. We had planned to spend a few days in Olympic National Park before taking a driving tour through the Cascade Mountain Range. Between our two families we had: your stereotypical screaming baby on the airplane (complete with a mom who didn't think to bring food or toys), a rental car agency that was not only not in the airport, but wasn't listed in the telephone directory, another rental car agency that charged for the most expensive insurance option available after we requested a waiver for the insurance, a rental car that was filthy, and a restaurant that didn't serve my lunch until the bill came for everyone else. Not a good first day. It's not a good way to lead off a travel article either, but what can I say? If the trip hadn't gotten better I wouldn't be writing about it. The first morning my wife, Rebecca, son, Andy, and I followed my brother's family (Tom,

Betty, Katy and Adam) north where we boarded a ferry to the Olympic Peninsula. On our way across the Puget Sound we got our first view of Mt. Rainier with Seattle's skyline in the foreground. Had we known that was going to be our best view of Washington's most impressive peak, I probably would have taken a few more pictures. Oops, sorry. I slipped back into that negativity again. The trip really did get better!

Olympic National Park

We decided to spend more time at Olympic than at anywhere else, mainly because of its diversity. There are three separate areas of the park and they've each got their own attractions. Mount Olympus, the highest peak in the Olympic mountain range dominates the interior of the park, while the Pacific coastal areas offer visitors a completely different aspect, with the Hoh rain forest is situated in between.

There are a number of trails that run throughout the park. We decided hike along Hurricane Ridge and were rewarded with wonderful views of the Olympic mountains, the Straits of Juan

de Fuca and blooming wildflowers all along the trail. There are a number of waterfalls that are created from the mountain run off. We also hiked to Marymere falls, one that Katy and Adam had seen in a travel video.

We explored two of the park's beaches, Rialto Beach and Ruby Beach. We arrived at both just before low tide, which allowed us to wade out into the lowest sections of the tide pool. At Rialto Beach we were able to tag along on a ranger led hike. She took us out to where hundreds of starfish and anemones attached themselves to the rocks.

At the Hoh Rain Forest we hiked the two major trails, the Spruce Nature Trail and the Hall of Mosses Trail. Since it was the end of the summer they had received little rain the previous three weeks. The forest wasn't as green or wet as we expected. There was an extraordinary number of ferns growing on the ground and on nurse logs, old dead trees that as they decay become home to new trees.

Our hike through the Hall of Mosses trail (not to be confused with the Hall of Mosses Trail, which ends at the Red Sea...) was also led by a ranger, and no, she didn't provide that joke for us. We've found that when we explore new areas it's often beneficial to tag along with a ranger. They can provide local history and are able to point out things that we would miss on our own.

The Cascades

After leaving Olympic we headed south, following the Cascade mountain range. We stopped at Mt. Rainier, Mt. St. Helens and made it as far south as Crater Lake in southern Oregon.

At Mount Rainier National Park we began by hiking to both Carter and Mendenhall Falls. There's no shortage of waterfalls to hike to so we stopped at the visitor center to get some recommendations from some of the rangers.

We headed up to Sunshine Point early the next morning. We went on a ranger hike to



Crater Lake: Rob, Rebecca and Andy Picard on Wizard Island in Crater Lake.

Emmons Glacier before opting for a lower elevation and warmer temperatures. We spent the rest of the day hiking to Sunrise and Clover Lake, where some of the local birds decided to try and steal our sandwiches. The kids thought it was pretty funny, but if the birds were that aggressive we didn't want to stick around to see what else was living there. On the hike back we saw a half dozen deer, including a couple spotted fawns. It seems the entire animal population of the park is accustomed to people.

Our next destination was Mount St. Helens. We drove to Windy Ridge where we hiked to Spirit Lake. As you approach the park, the first glimpse of the devastation is quite impressive. We came away with quite a few science fair ideas.

The entrance on the west side of the park takes you to Johnson Ridge Observatory where you can look directly into the ridge of what used to be the mountain. The new lava dome is visible complete with steam rising from fissures around the dome. We hiked a trail that went through a

pumas field where there was little growth, almost 20 years later. Overall this was one of my favorite parts of the trip.

From there our next stop was Crater Lake. Roughly 6600 years ago Mount Mazama erupted before collapsing in on itself. The resulting crater began filling with rain and snow and is now the deepest lake in the United States. There's not as much to do here as there is at the more famous parks in Washington, but we did hike to The Watchman, an old lookout tower that provided a panoramic view of the lake.

There are a lot of other attractions other than the volcano range, and we did take time to stop at a few. Fort Clatsop, where Lewis and Clark spent the winter of 1805-6, was on Tom's list of places to see, and Andy studied the Oregon Trail last year in school so we stopped at a couple of Oregon Trail museums.

At Newberry National Volcanic we hiked through a mile long lava tube cave. Parts of the cave were 20 feet high and you can see small stalactites forming

on the ceiling. We also hiked to the Big Obsidian Flow, an enormous area of black volcanic glass. Like most things on this vacation the vastness of the formation is quite impressive.

On a whim we decided to visit the Historic Columbia River Highway. We were surprised at the beauty of the road. It was opened in 1915 and was based on European roads that incorporated the sights along the way instead of avoiding them. 600 foot waterfalls emptied into pools that were a few dozen feet from the road. By far this road was our most pleasant surprise of the trip and we'll make sure we spend more time in the area on our next trip.

Overall I would have liked to spend more time just about every place we visited. Since it was our first trip to this part of the country we took the "let's see it all" route. Next time we'll choose two or three spots and spend more of our time on the trails and less time in the car.

Ron Picard and his family live in Livonia.



Washington native: Andy Picard examines a sea star on Washington's rocky coast.

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