

Olympic National Park Collection, 1991-1998

Hiking, Backpacking, and Scrambling the Mountains and Coast



Left to Right: (top) St. Peter's Gate, Royal Basin, Thousand-Acre Meadow; (bottom) Mt. Olympus, High Divide - east, south

Introduction

This latest revision has focused on the best of my love/hate relationship with the Olympics, which includes many firsts in my history of with the wilderness. Despite many positive trips, though, the Olympics provide some bad moments and memories (injuries, weather, poor estimation of difficulty/ability, monotonous forests, relationship problems...). I'm not sure what it means that I haven't returned to the Olympics since 1998... maybe I have found better places, maybe the net sum of Olympic experiences is negative, or maybe it is both. In terms of the **NE Corner**, I retained in order of history: Royal Basin, Grand/Cameron, Hayden/Thousand-Acre Meadow (TAM). In terms of the **SE Corner**, I retained in order of preference: Lena/Putvin, LaCrosse/Anderson, and the Enchanted Valley. I did not include the following: Mts. Jupiter, Ellinor, Townsend (gorgeous but too crowded); Flapjack, Mildred, Black/White Lakes (bland); and Tubal Cain Mine (strangely epic but visually bland). In terms of the **Western Half**, I retained in order of preference: High Divide, Hoh/Mt. Olympus Blue Glacier, Skyline Traverse, and a brief synopsis of Elwha/Low Divide (boring unless all you want to see is trees). In terms of the **Coast** (re-added in 2017), I included Beach-Hiking 101, Riato to Ozette, and Shi-Shi.



Left to Right (top): Flapjack Lake, from Mt. Ellinor looking to Mt. Washington, from Mt. Townsend looking south

NE Corner: Ellen's First Backpack - Royal Basin, September 1993

John and I took Ellen on her first backpack to Royal Basin, arriving at the Dungeness River trailhead at 2 p.m. It was clear and warm. In order to give Ellen a break, John and I carried the bulk of the common gear. Within an hour, Ellen (a runner and 5 years younger) traded her pack for mine and smoked John and I. The trail meandered alongside the Dungeness for some time, through puddles and over knotty roots. We then entered a clearing, crossed into the national park, and climbed alongside Royal Creek. At 2500 feet, we broke into open meadows and it was obvious we were heading into a higher cirque, crags towering above the trees. Overall, the long valley was composed of many tiers. We finally felt we were making progress when we came to swampy Royal Lake around 5:30. Given MANY parties camped here, we decided to climb to the next cirque - which involved many steep switchbacks and lots of whining (which Ellen and I excel at). Once the sun sank below the ridge, we were reminded that it was autumn. We leveled out again in low, yellow grass - Royal Creek winding through the gentle meadow. After passing other tents, we set up camp and dined on beef stroganoff and blackberry dumplings. A doe freaked us out as we washed our dishes, her glowing eyes catching the light of our headlamps. Despite Ellen's screaming, the doe watched us from a distance for some time. After bathroom runs, we all bedded down for the night (Ellen and I together and John by himself). Ellen was not prepared for the cold (given frost the next morning, we knew it was freezing). Despite having been told to wear a hat and not to over-dress in her bag, Ellen ignored us and suffered, tossing and fretting about how she was not going to make it. The next morning, the sun took forever to come over the eastern ridge. The sky was totally clear (as it had been all night). Our goal for the day was to climb to the final tier of Royal Basin - immediately under Mt. Deception, the

second highest peak in the Olympics. Wearing shorts and T-shirts, we climbed first to a long green hanging valley. Walking along its marshy perimeter, we then climbed a very steep section on dusty bare rock. At the top, we broke into the final, incredible cirque: rolling hills of emerald green dotted with flowers, rocky meadows filled with opaque, opalescent tarns. Above these features were talus fields, quarries strewn with remnant stones from the higher peaks. Snowfields occasionally dotted the shadowed clefts or gullies on the rock. Surprisingly, Mt. Deception did not stand out along the ridgeline. Had we more time, I would have enjoyed scrambling any number of slopes to ridgelines for bigger perspectives over the valley and peaks. Ellen and I did try to scramble some talus but found it so time-consuming and potentially dangerous that we gave up. Following our trip, a co-worker of mine took his brother here and wound up scrambling into really bad shit, including several hours trapped on a ledge before calming down and self-rescuing. On our way down, we enjoyed 1 side-trip to a spectacular waterfall (5 minutes from our tent). We also inspected Shelter Rock, a large boulder that could provide emergency shelter for people who came unprepared. After returning to our campsite, we lunched, packed up, and headed home. I think the trip back felt longer; I know Ellen and I were both extremely tired, wanting a hot shower and warm bed. Notably, Ellen remarked that she was surprised how lazy I was on this trip; she'd forgotten that I'd just backpacked the Wonderland Trail for 9 days straight.



Left to Right: (top) Royal Basin setting out, camp, hanging valley; (bottom) upper basin, me and Mt. Deception, return to camp

NE Corner: Dos Wallops Obstructs Our Plans, August 1994

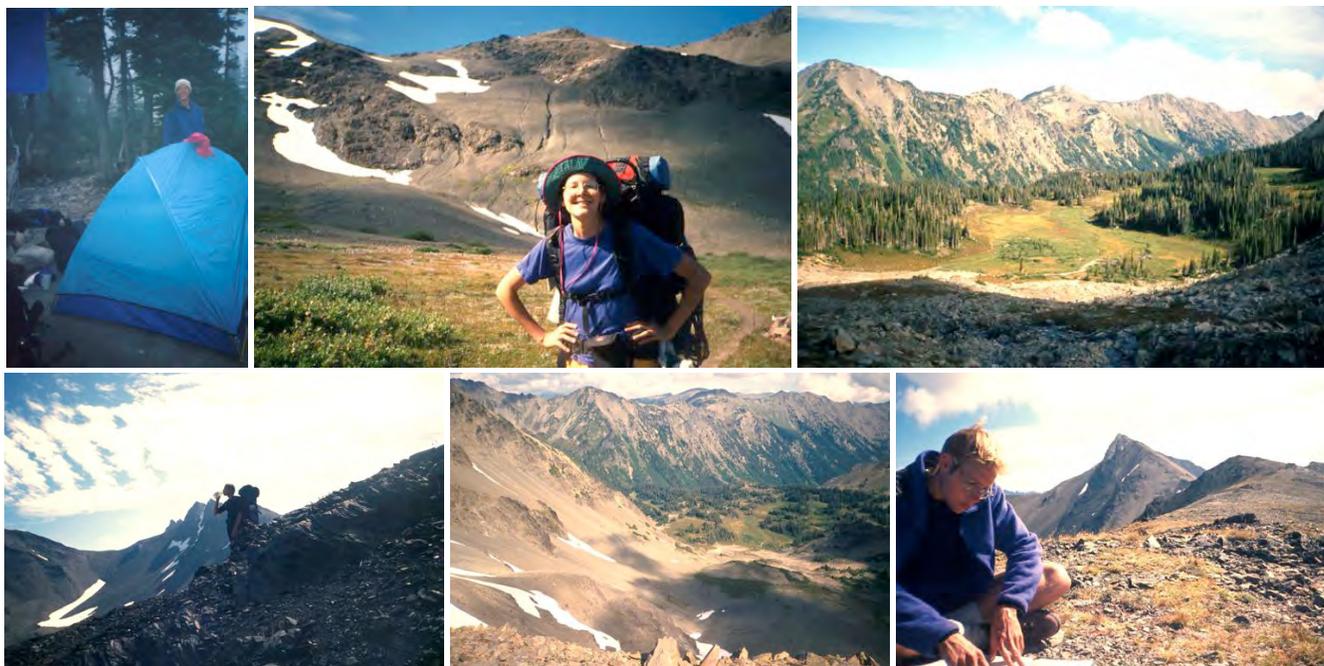
This trip began with MUCH greater intentions than were accomplished. Originally, John and I wanted to cross the entire park (60-70 miles), including exiting via the Skyline (which we eventually did as a separate trip). One reason for our ridiculous arrogance: we'd done the Wonderland Trail and figured we were ready for ANYTHING. But there were 2 key differences between the Wonderland and our planned traverse: the grades of unofficial Olympic way trails (comprising many sections of this traverse) far exceed those on Rainier, and better road access around Rainier (i.e. food drops every 30 miles). Carrying 9 days of food on harder terrain was WAY too much. Unfortunately, another thing we didn't have going for us in the Olympics was the weather. Heading for Hurricane Ridge, we turned onto the Obstruction Point road (5 minutes before the visitor center). This rutted, edgy dirt road took longer than expected - but the views were superlative. The final parking lot, at nearly 6000 feet, was cold but sunny. We took off at 11 a.m., weighed down by massive packs, and walked dry barren ridges for about 1.5 miles. I remember wearing mid-weight thermal underwear, the cold wind driving relentlessly through the thin fabric. Staring east, it was difficult to envision where, along those distant hills, Grand and Cameron Passes lay. And then the way dropped substantially into Grand Valley - a lake-strewn valley of talus, thin stands of fir, meadows.



Left to Right: John at Obstruction point, descending to Grand Valley, quarry-like trail to Grand Pass

What looked close from high up took forever to reach - although the wind died down. I remember the pack bothering me as I struggled down the dry, steep trail. John, well ahead of me, should have been carrying more. We came to the first lake (Grand) but found it unsatisfactory for a snack/rest break. Moose Lake, a mile higher, was more open, the trail passing right along its perimeter. Famished, we stopped and sat at the water's edge, eating our fill of trail mix. In an earlier version of our plans, we

considered camping by Moose - something that, in retrospect, could have avoided ultimate knee injuries that ended this trip prematurely. Continuing, the upper reaches of Grand Valley were surreal: barren, desolate meadows (lots of deep blue gentians) commingled with vast and rolling cirques of quarry-like talus (devastated and yet enduring). My sense of direction was all screwed up as I fixated on this simple-looking gap in the distance: Grand Pass - it HAD to be. When the trail lead us up and away from said gap, I fretted - my anxiety not helped by massive clouds that squelched all views. And so we hiked into the white mist, into a rocky wasteland comprised of nothing but stones. I remember, more than anything that day, the lightly crisp sound of the flat, sedimentary talus - picking up flakes and commenting that they felt like flint and fell apart in my hands with little pressure... the complex colors of the rock - highlights of reddish brown shimmering in the light. At some point, we met a family of 6 (including 4 boys). Mom and dad had climbed extensively, including the Bailey Range and Skyline - so we had plenty to gab about. The trail seemed to meander, traversing stone heap after stone heap. Above, ominous fields of snow scared the crap out of me. Soon, however, people coming down from the pass assured us that there was only one low angle snowfield to the north (the south side was snow-free). We climbed up loose rock on a barely visible trail that was, on the map, called un-maintained and primitive. Occasionally, eerie crags peered through the intermittent, pulsing fog that settled around 6000 feet (Grand Pass 400 feet higher). Once at the pass, we were completely in a dank, cold cloud - depressing, given that the views from here were ridiculously legendary. After filling water bottles using snowmelt just before the pass, we ascended a brief ramp to the wedge-like gap. I was totally freaked out by the other side: 40-50° down for at least 200 feet. My body froze and did not want to go down the 20 switchbacks that gingerly descended the virtual cliff: no trees, no foliage... beyond - the fog too thick to see. I cannot imagine the awesomeness and awfulness of this view on a clear day. But the terrain grew less steep a third of the way down, coinciding with the appearance of floral meadows and marmot families perking up from holes amidst green clumps of grass. I stopped to adjust my boots, which were now blistering my toes. From the meadows, the way led down a narrow, steep, waterlogged ravine, the creek having infiltrated the trail. As we dropped into the trees, I had to yell ahead to John to wait. The descent to Cameron Creek felt like it took forever. From this intersection, we still had 3.5 miles to go up to Cameron Basin - and it was already 5:30. Guidebooks describe this region is claustrophobic but I have seen thicker terrain elsewhere. The trail varied tremendously: flat for long stretches and then wildly steep and roundabout. Eventually, the trees began to thin, the groundcover grew more dominated with flowers, and a light quality overtook the sky. After 30 minutes of steady climbing, we met a tame, drooling deer that had lost most of its lower jaw. John actually petted it after handing it some grass. A large party occupied the first site in the basin and seemed weirdly eager to have us join them. Based on catching them praying, we surmised they were Happy Christians (a Jenn term). The more private campsite we chose was up a short hill, near a rocky cataract. We unpacked in dense, damp fog. With little light, I threw bear-lines over silver snags and, later, the hare-lipped deer approached us as we prepared dinner. We retired early but it was so cold that I found myself losing heat wherever I was not touching John. In the middle of the night, I went out to use a tree. Although I was not surprised to find it clear, I was amazed at the beauty: the huge, jagged circle of peaks comprising the Grand Pass region - this array of diminishing dark tones against partially moonlit skies. Immediately adjacent were McCartney and the peaks surrounding Cameron Pass - luminescent blue-white snowfields and glaciers tucked amidst high planes of rocks. There is such a unique beauty to wilderness at night: the quality of the mountains, snow, the subtle shades of blue and white and black.



Left to Right: Cameron camp, all the rest are climbing Cameron Pass (third and fifth show Grand Pass in distance)

In the morning, we awoke to dispersing clouds. To the west, Cameron Pass appeared clear, with rugged talus and a single snowfield. Cameron has a reputation for being dangerous, with park maps stating that icy conditions exist there year-round - crampons and ice axes required. But the virtually clear, serpentine trail switch-backed through talus and rocky outcroppings. Halfway up, the path appeared to level out and cross a straightforward ramp of snow. Retrospectively, I cannot fathom why Cameron is rated as so difficult. John and I ate breakfast slowly because we felt today's hike would be short and easy: 6 miles (how bad could THAT be?). As we packed, the Happy Christians passed and we watched them climb Cameron. We started up the trail, our packs still heavy. Almost immediately, Grand Pass came into full view, appearing SO huge and steep

that I had to sit and stare at it for sometime with my map, convincing myself that we actually came down that thing. In contrast, Cameron seemed fast and, before we knew it, we were on the rocky outcrops. Despite my usual vertigo, I found myself enjoying the vast beauty of the basin that opened before us. Soon we reached the snowfield, a foot-deep trench of footprints that would prevent even the most idiotic fall from being dangerous. Getting to the pass required a brief climb across this broad, flat arm of land where a tall cairn of logs and stones marked the dividing point between major Olympic drainages. Before us lay the Bailey Range and Mt. Olympus beneath a bank of clouds. To the southwest, Mt. Anderson was partly obscured by a threateningly dark sky. After surveying the maps, we found Lost and Hayden Passes and their flanking peaks (Sentinel and Claywood). Behind, Cameron Basin beckoned me with all its might to return someday - and stay a little longer.



Left to Right: TAM from Lost Pass, Dose Meadows, John reading the good book in our cheap hotel room

After eating, we headed down gentle grassy slopes that contoured southwest toward Lost Pass. We were pleased to find a massive meadow (unnamed on any maps) ringed by towering peaks and intersected by babbling brooks. As we descended, however, my iliotibial band (ITB) began to give. This had happened once before during a steep, sustained descent on Rainier. We met the Happy Christians and they offered us Kool-aid, asking where we were going. In response to "across the park," they seemed surprised. We proceeded, my leg not bothering me much during the ascent to Lost Pass (ITB injuries notably hurt more downhill). From Lost Pass, we surveyed the astounding TAM across the valley: an emerald carpet that comprised a massive shelf above a forested band of dark trees (just above Dose Camp). We could even make out a bear wandering across the green in that recognizably ursine manner. Above TAM was Hayden Pass, tomorrow's goal - a knife-like ridge between Claywood and Sentinel peaks. For some reason, this whole region reminded me of a cluttered room - all the passes felt too close together, pushed together via some massive geological faux pas. As we started down, a young bear ran across our paths and into the trees. The Lost Pass trail was one of the steepest, ugliest things I've ever hiked (1700 feet/mile). After a tortuous 1.8 miles, during which time John took most heavy things from my pack, we reached Dose. At 2:30, we set up camp and spent the rest of the afternoon eating much of our food, our decision to bail cinched during the horrible descent. John treated me to a warm sponge bath, the water heated in an effort to consume now-extra fuel. Dose Camp is situated in a stand of firs along the North Fork of the Dosewallips. To the east, brushy meadows ascend the flanks of Mt. Claywood, which was especially beautiful as a full moon cut an arc around its craggy summit that night. The next morning following breakfast, we attempted to retreat quickly, hoping to catch the Happy Christians and hitch a ride out. No such luck. The first part of our North Fork escape trail traversed short stretches of forest followed by long walks through waist-tall grass meadows. From the latter, Mts. Deception and Mystery were impressive. As we descended further, we entered all forest, passing tantalizing Greywolf junction (a place I still have never been). At the crossing of Deception Creek, we met a 50-something woman stalwartly carrying her external frame pack and enviably intending to solo Greywolf. Between Deception Creek and the trailhead, the trail meandered up and down, driving my knee crazy. At the road, we were car- and phone-less (indeed, Dosewallips - like MANY Olympic trailheads - offered ZERO facilities). Something about my desperate expression and sorry body must have inspired 2 trail repair crewmembers (who turned out to be friends of friends) to take us back to the highway. A relaxing evening was spent in a VERY cheap hotel along the Hood Canal. Sadly, it was my 27th birthday. I certainly did not get what I wanted: to be sitting atop Sentinel Peak by an awesome sunset. Given the circumstances, though, I got what I wanted for the moment: hot shower, bed, roof over my head, to rest my knee, and mom picking us up. It is funny how drastically wishes can change (RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT 1999 - I got closer to that dream in 1998, next report).



Left to Right: me on Cameron Pass, Sentinel Peak by twilight, Jay on Sentinel Peak (Mt. Deception in left background)

NE Corner: Four Perfect Days in Dose Meadows, August 1998

This was my trip to plan because Jay had just come off a grueling traverse in the Glacier Peak Wilderness. Even so, notions of just a simple trail-hike were not high on Jay's list. But I insisted this area held great peak-bagging potential - if he wanted to go climb something, I was fine hanging back (as Jay's scrambling often scared the shit out of me). Our goal was to hike up the North Fork Dosewallips, set up basecamp at Dose (13 miles, 2000 feet), and dayhike/scramble from there for 2 days. Although

I picked Jay up around 9 a.m, we reached Brinnon late because of road construction. Famished, we stopped at a cafe for a second breakfast. I handed my then-new Forester to Jay so he could enjoy the ugly dirt road to the crowded Dosewallips trailhead. Given that I hadn't carried a backpack in a year, the beast intimidated me and I could not fathom why Jay's pack looked so light (goose-down bag?). After hiking a mile, we headed right to Dose (left heads to Anderson Pass). And then it was miles and miles (and hours and hours) of trees. Despite looking nice in the morning, the mountain weather wasn't great (although, thankfully, it was not raining). Thus, I began to doubt we would have decent views tomorrow. We could, however, see most of the high mountains (e.g. Deception). The last 2 miles were hellishly slow, Jay hiking significantly ahead of me. It was also colder and I began to doubt my decision to travel clothes-light (shorts, tank top, longjohns, raingear). We arrived at Dose Camp (I accidentally typed "Damp") at 7 p.m. But nearly every campsite was taken. Our choices: a private lumpy grassy site or a flat dry spot 30 feet from another party (we took the latter). While Jay set up the tent, I prepared chicken and noodles with spinach soup. Every night at Dose, I slept better than usual... I don't know why (being out of graduate school, perhaps?). I also began a Mary-recommended Solar Storms, which granola-types will love. After sunset, the skies cleared, affording the potential to see shooting stars (unfortunately, most of the sky was eclipsed by high peaks and ridges).



Left to Right: forest creek, to Dose Meadows, climbing Hayden Pass

We set out at a leisurely pace the next day, our goals including Hayden, Sentinel (Class 1-2), Claywood (Class 2-3), and TAM. The hike to Hayden Pass was one of the most beautiful trails I have ever done - not to mention short. After half a mile in the woods, the way cut across a giant meadow. Here, a large bear (100 feet away) ran, stopped, and looked back at us for a long time. We climbed through stands of fir and meadow, winding up into a spectacular hanging valley: heather, huckleberry, rocks, a creek curving through the rolling terrain. Above, the trail to Hayden Pass zigzagged up steep and barren earth. The pass occupied a long saddle between tame Sentinel (left) and HUGE Fromme/Claywood (right). After climbing the switchbacks, I was a little disappointed with the pass: a narrow ridge of trees - no Mt. Anderson, little Mt. Olympus. Shrugging, we located an obvious boot-beaten path up Sentinel. The way wrapped a long circle around the other side of the peak - the last 100 feet climbing this breathtaking shale hogback. What was SO stupendous was not just the view of Anderson; it was the perspective over the park (easily the BEST in Olympic - and one of the top 10 in Washington). I could have spent all day on Sentinel. But we dropped back to the pass and I considered ascending Claywood with Jay. From the pass, the route appeared to traverse along the top of the ridge, heading out toward the Dose-facing front of the peak. Within minutes, said path climbed over exposed rock that did not appeal to me. I decided to hold back and, having brought my novel, enjoy reading in the sun.



Left to Right: (top) Sentinel views - Claywood, Lost, Cameron, TAM/Deception; (bottom) Anderson from Sentinel, in TAM

An hour later, an older couple popped over the pass. They had been up Claywood, pointing out a MUCH easier route from lower down the trail. What really bummed me out was that they said Claywood was barely tougher than Sentinel. And from the summit, you stared down into gorgeous deep blue Claywood Lake. I was jealous - but I also did not feel comfortable setting out on my own. Given that it was late (and I surmised Jay was now tackling neighboring Fromme), I decided to head

back to camp and start dinner. As I started down, I heard my name from high on the pass. By the time Jay reached me, it was 5:30 and I figured the next goal was dinner. Nope. Jay wanted to visit TAM. We proceeded off-trail, intending to cross this ridge that, in theory, lead directly to TAM. Walking to the ridgeline proved difficult, as it was a minefield of marmot holes. We poked through a line of trees only to find a steep slope leading down to a small meadow. I figured we'd give up but Jay was already down the hill. Within 5 minutes, we reached the GRAND part of TAM. Given views from the top of Sentinel, we knew there were tarns higher up. And so we aimed for this talus gap, reasoning we could easily traverse from this point back around to the base of Sentinel. After climbing the gap, we found ourselves in a gorgeous cirque that looked right onto Anderson - which, in the dusky light, appeared magnificent. The peacefulness and solitude of this spot - combined with the powdery lightness - was truly magical. But, alas, those were fleeting thoughts. We were running out of daylight and didn't know where we were. When we came to a drop-off that I thought looked impassable, Jay was already shimmying down the terrifically steep slope, holding on to trees and shrubbery. Sufficed to say, I expressed much foul language. But I made it down to a lower meadow - above which was another gap. We reasoned (correctly) that the base of Sentinel lay above. Coming to the small saddle and seeing Hayden Pass was splendid for many reasons. We returned to camp, running all the way. That day was perfection - not to mention a typical day with Jay - who always pushes my limits and ignores/exacerbates my cussing.



Left to Right: meadow near Lost Pass, looking back onto Lost Pass and TAM, Cameron Pass and Bailey Range

The next day, our goal was to hike to Cameron Pass. Where Jay wanted to cross-country between Lost and Cameron, I opted for the trail. Jay and I ascended Lost Pass together, even Jay agreeing the way trail was unreasonably steep. At the pass, we talked with some photographers packing up their trailside camp, having come from Obstruction Point a week before. After being alerted of a bear in the area, Jay and I separated. Of course, I was now terrified - even though there were plenty of people on the route. Restlessly clanking my ski poles together, I climbed to Cameron in no time. Of course, fear was soon replaced by breathless awe given the spectacular views missed before due to bad weather - including Olympus. Seeing Cameron Basin requires descending 20 feet down the other side of the pass. Looking down, I knew Cameron Basin was still one of the most beautiful places I'd ever spent the night. I stayed at the pass an hour, lounging amidst many backpackers. Upon returning to camp, I washed in the creek and dried in the sun. Then I mixed vanilla pudding and left the bowl in the river, covered with a giant rock - after which I enjoyed a LONG nap. Jay returned several hours later - blood down his leg. We sat at the river's edge eating pudding while he regaled me with tales from his traverse. Although he basically did what he set out to do, he had to drop down from the ridgeline several times because of exposure and rotten rock. Later, we enjoyed dinner, a warmer night, and more impressive stars. The next morning, we left early and were out by 2 p.m. Jay remarked that this was his best trip of the summer. That meant a lot because I always felt the Olympics were Jay's - someplace he gave to me.



Left to Right: leaving the trail at Upper Lena, definitely not on a trail over St. Peter's Gate, me at Lake of the Angels

SE Corner: Lena Lakes, St. Peter's Gate, Lake of the Angels, Putvin Trail, July 1996

I have many qualms about writing up this report because this was a crazy trip and I don't want to encourage similar behavior in anyone without climbing and route-finding skills. Indeed, we were reminded of this trip's danger by the presence of a large search and rescue team (with helicopter), all summoned to find a backpacking party who got lost a few days before. Saner alternatives would include either Lower or Upper Lena Lake (6-14 miles, 2000-4000 feet up/down). For our insane off-trail adventure, I was joined/led by Jay, who had done the route several years ago as a 3-day backpack; consequently, he knew the key route-finding crux, a not-so-obvious notch called St. Peter's Gate. Armed with ice axes, headlamps, and full daypacks, we set out to do Lena to Putvin in 1 day (20 miles, 5000+ feet gained/lost). We left Tacoma at 6 a.m. on July 21. For 3 days prior, the weather had been unseasonably bad, snow falling above 6000 feet and dark clouds amassing over the Olympics daily. A high-pressure system was establishing, though, and, on the morning we left, the Olympics were fairly clear. At Jay's, I accepted a glass of his famous breakfast shake (historically - bananas, oatmeal, and milk). Half way down, he tells me he

added a raw egg and I about spit it out. Needless to say, I retrospectively blame our success and survival on that egg. But I digress. Our traverse began at the Lena Lake trailhead, accessed via the Hamma Hamma ("stinky, stinky" because of the massive salmon runs that ultimately ended in death/rot). From Tacoma, our driving time was 2 hours. Years ago, I enjoyed Lena Lake - my first dayhike in the Olympics - with Jay. Jay and I had also hiked to Upper Lena before - in late June with snow the last mile and fog socking in all views. The latter is notoriously steep and long - not to mention brushy, wet, regularly clogged with blow down, and fairly viewless. At a few points, you traverse several steep outcrops, requiring holding roots and full-on scrambling. This morning, we noticed the fog was rolling in fast. Near one of these outcrops was an incredible growth of fragrant wild roses. Beyond, the trail continued to climb, climb, climb - crossing many small streams (one challenging given the lack of a bridge). Somewhere en route is a famous park sign that has been graffiti-carved by sadistic hikers: "1 mile up." By the time you reach the sign, you will be hard-pressed to accept the truth (that it really is another mile up). Having not found the sign, Jay was convinced it must have been removed (based on his altimeter readings). Within 15 minutes, though, there it was. Indeed, the incoming weather like affected the altimeter readings - and when your apparent elevation is higher than it should be, expect trouble. As with our previous trip, Upper Lena Lake was fairly socked in. With me now setting the pace, we set out along the lakeshore trail, talking briefly with a ranger who was not amused with our itinerary (given the rescue operation). He explained that the search team had found the missing party (some "kids") near Scout Lake (about half-way across), where they got messed up attempting St. Peter's Gate. They had the sense to come down but spent a long time finding their way back - and, in the process, run out of food and energy to the point that helicopters were pulling them off. Curiously, we never read/heard about this episode in the paper or on the news. Although I was slightly concerned about heading out against the ranger's wishes, I have always had this strangely deep trust for Jay; I also knew we had enough gear to deal with problems - and sense to pull back if need be. As we headed off-trail, more clouds rolled in with a fury. I continued leading/picking up the pace, with Jay humming 10 minutes behind (believe me - this was NOT the usual way we hiked). For 1 mile, the route was 90% boot-beaten trail. En route, we met the search team, a bunch of mellow mountaineers who said we'd have no problems because the weather was breaking up and they had seen St. Peter's Gate many times that day. This made me feel better, causing me to focus on the socked-in views. I have this thing about seeing stuff on clear days; thus, clouds all day might mean I'd have to come back to see what I missed. Of course, the local views were tremendous as we had precisely hit the major flower season. Against the fog, the reds and purples and greens of the vast meadows appeared more amazing than they would have in the blinding sun from an ultraviolet blue sky.



Left to Right: Upper Lena Lake, various off-trail shots between Upper Lena and Scout Lake (right-most image)

The way climbed a steady angle up green meadows to a pass of sorts. Here, the views are said to be stunning: LaCrosse Pass and Mt. Anderson. Although the lower flanks of Anderson were apparent, its summit spires were lost to swirling clouds. Nonetheless, it was one of those moments where the connectivity and relativity of the Olympics stood out in grand proportions. Beyond, the immediate fog lightened, giving way to clear local skies. The route became exceedingly faint, climbing through rock and meadow with tarns in every cup of rock. Hiking through this incredible landscape, I was drawn to recollections of the Skyline Traverse. While incredible in its own rite, it was not anything like I pictured based on guidebook descriptions (it was also low on alpine meadows). As I traversed this section, I constantly thought: WOW - THIS is how I pictured the Skyline. Tarn upon tarn, combined with the passage of time, made us uncertain about where large Scout Lake (the next big landmark) was. Scout Lake occupies a large cleft, the route descending steeply to access it. To avoid this drop and stay on the main traverse, you are told to keep high. Well, Jay and I missed the high-route and were already down the hellish descent - erroneously assuming we were dropping to Stone Ponds (the next landmark). Somewhere during the descent, Scout appeared - clearly the biggest lake around. We decided to keep going - as we knew that the high-route eventually met the low route. Compared with other descents on this traverse, it wasn't bad. There was 1 hairy spot that required full-on climbing down a 10-foot vertical wall. Jay covered me as I down-climbed, face into the roots and rocks. Somewhere near here, we saw our first view of things to come: Mt. Stone, which flanks St. Peter's Gate, is the major massif to the south of Scout Lake. Mt. Stone consists of bulging pillow lava on the west and a series of talus/snow gullies, notches, and spires on the east. The notion, as guidebooks state, that St. Peter's Gate (not even named on most maps) is obvious is misleading as there are at least 2 major notches; the correct feature has a big rock tooth intersecting the gully mid-way up the snow (obvious in several pictures). Such was the trap Jay and his partner fell into during their first traverse (and promptly found themselves on cliffs around the other side). Even my impression of the notches would have favored the wrong feature because it looks easier from this angle. The bottom line: you need more than just a map and visible terrain; in my case, I needed Jay's guidance (or my blind faith in him). Having not endured Jay's rigorous Catholic upbringing, I also lack an affinity for religious names (in fact, I may be repelled by such things). From near Scout, we ascended rolling rock and meadow, eventually finding ourselves above Stone Pond but separated from it by 200 vertical feet of trees. Jay insisted on following a rudimentary trickle through soaked berries. This dead-ended on stuff that was way too steep. I took my only fall here: a 10-foot slide on slick leaves before digging into pine-needle-covered mud. Thus, we decided to turn back and find a better way down. Within 5 minutes, we located a decent meadow ramp that meandered on wet heather down an upright route to the pond. Barely stopping at the water's edge, we began climbing a boulder field below a string of snowfields leading up to the gate. No path whatsoever lay ahead of us. At the snowfield, ice

axes were drawn - the snow hard from several cold days, not to mention an icy wind. Resting on some rocks, we enjoyed glorious views north to the glaringly rocky faces of Constance (Seattle and Rainier to the east). The final snowfield was 30-40° at its worst point (adjacent to the aforementioned tooth that splayed the snowfield). Above, the grade was gentler but the ice was harder. In retrospect, wearing 6-year-old tread-less Raichle's was not the safest thing. Jay confessed later that the snowfield bothered him (this took my breath away because I figure I'm overly scared about shit like that). But I did struggle a great deal, deliberately planting my feet and axe correctly because I knew a fall would terminate abruptly in rocks and injuries.



Left to Right: tarn near Scout Lake, first view of St. Peter's Gate from Stone Ponds, on the snowfields

At the gap, we were afforded vertigo-inspiring views of Mt. Skokomish and Lake of the Angels. I don't know why but I stupidly assumed the other side was a gentle meadow. In fact, it was another seriously steep scree slope that shook me up to the point that lunch didn't agree with me. Indeed, I spent most of the time on the gate changing my now-snow-soaked socks. Nearby rock-fall triggered inspection, revealing a scraggly mountain goat limberly descending the north side of the gate. Nervous about how slow I would be, I started down before Jay, piecing my way down ball-bearing gravel on dirt. Eventually I made it down to this rocky shelf 200 vertical feet above the lake - separated from it by a wall of trees (where Jay caught up with me). My one photograph looking up the gap is notably out of focus because I was still shaking! At this point, we should have stayed high on these blocky rocks and contoured gently down. Instead, we descended directly, walking cliffy step-like shelves (10-foot drops to more sloping junk below). This dead-ended in trees but, given that it was 5 p.m., we thought it better to just crash on through. Lake of the Angels, the end of the "off-trail" adventure, soon lay before us, set in a stunning rock and snow bowl reminiscent of the Enchantments (although I have to confess that it did look cooler from above).



Left to Right: snowfields and Stone Ponds, Lake of the Angels, out of focus shot below gate, gate from Lake of the Angels

Given the time, we quickly began down the legendarily difficult Putvin Way Trail. The initial descent from Lake of the Angels to the next lower shelf was decent, although Jay took a number of falls on super-muddy rocks (each terminated with a butt-hitting thud and Jay's classic Catholic swearing extravaganzas: Holy Mother, Jesus Christ, SHIT!!!!). An intermediate shelf contained another greener basin with several tarns (e.g. Lake of the False Prophet - to continue the Catholic theme), not to mention boot-sucking mud (so much for the new socks). Once we hit forest, things began a decidedly extreme pitch (i.e. 2000 feet/mile). Roots were our best friends as we down-scrambled numerous vertical stretches. The worst was this 10-foot drop on the tip of a rock outcrop. As you swung around it, your view was a 100-foot drop into trees. There were a couple other bad spots, but nothing with quite so much exposure. Finally, we met up with an old logging road (now closed to traffic) and hiked 1 mile down to the paved Hamma Hamma Road. It was 9:30. Jay had knowingly packed running shoes, planning to jog the road back to the car (3.5 miles away) and come back for me (SUCH a gentleman AND stud). And so he vanished, leaving me to hungrily eat all that I couldn't stomach up on the gate. Within 5 minutes, though, the bugs were relentless and I decided to put my headlamp on and follow Jay. Over the next 45 minutes, I was possessed with strange fears of cougars and bears (having caught a few silver eyes reflecting back from the woods). The thought of smelly Jay running past just before me to tantalize the beasts didn't help. Honestly, this little walk scared me MORE than anything encountered all day. Jay picked me up after I'd already walked 3 miles (SUCH a stud-ette). Conversation during our crazy Putvin descent had focused on a greasy spoon near Hood Canal that serves open face roast beef sandwiches. Unfortunately, by the time we arrived there it was 10:30 p.m. and they were closed. It should be no surprise that we were not home until 1 a.m. Nevertheless, we did enjoy a leisurely breakfast at Lessie's Southern Kitchen - shit on a shingle being the closest analog to open-face roast beef sandwiches.

SE Corner: LaCrosse Basin and Anderson Pass, September 1993

In 1993, John and I chose this hike for Labor Day weekend, thinking others would be crazy to attempt this grueling trip in 3.5 days (guidebooks recommend 5 days minimum). Big mistake. After a late start on Friday, we hiked by dusk to our first camp

in Diamond Meadows. While the weather was clear, it was definitely MUCH colder by the late afternoon. From camp, stars could be seen between the silhouette of tree branches. We ate quickly and retired for the night. Saturday's elevation changes were truly insane: climbing to Honeymoon Meadows (1000 feet), climbing to LaCrosse Pass (2500 feet), descending to the Duckabush (3000 feet), and then climbing back up to LaCrosse Basin (3000 feet). To this day, I don't know what I was thinking. Leaving at 8:30 a.m., Honeymoon was painless. Then the junction with the LaCrosse Pass trail was met and we proceeded left, heading south via a convoluted path that didn't feel like it was heading anywhere. After a long spell in trees, we broke out onto an open slope. The trail was difficult to see and hard to negotiate because tall, mounding grass obscured foot-sized marmot holes and rocks. As we generally climbed toward a distant sawtooth ridge, the setting became alpine - dominated by boulder fields. LaCrosse pass surprised us, frankly: nothing more than rustic wooden sign enclosed by gnarled trees. We lunched here, the views back stunning: Mts. LaCrosse and Anderson. After dropping through trees, we broke out into still-colorful meadows with commanding (but hazy) views of Mt. Duckabush and the Brothers. Descending bone-dry forest, we met 2 men who warned of wasps near the valley floor (bears - 1 of which we saw - were rooting them up).



Left to Right: Mt. Duckabush reflected in Hart Lake, Mt. Anderson, Mt. Duckabush from the first crest of LaCrosse Basin

Once we hit the valley bottom, the hike up/along the Duckabush River seemed TOO long. The trail - which should have been called "Duck, a bush!" - was choked with slide alder, grasses, and low brush. The braided river required 2 barefoot, mid-thigh fords. Upon coming to a well-developed camp (a surprise given the bad quality of the trail), we surmised that crews must come in from the more popular Skokomish/Staircase Trail, 5 minutes past camp. I seriously wondered if we should camp here given that it was already 3:30 p.m. and we still had a LOT more climbing. But we continued, the trail meandering through brush as it headed into the dead-end cirque beneath Mt. Duckabush. With temperatures soaring to 80°, I felt dehydrated and sick. Climbing into forest, we came upon a bear that seemed too comfortable with us. Eventually, we ascended a long series of switchbacks that generally lead toward Mt. Duckabush. Although we were now in shade, I was tired, in a bad mood, and lagging behind John. The first thing I remember about the "top" was the ranger tent with a double burner Coleman stove, thinking: how the hell did anyone carry THAT up here?! And then all the other tents started to become apparent. The ranger told us that they were WAY over their limits here at Marmot Lake; we'd have to travel on to Hart (not to be confused with High Divide Heart) or more remote LaCrosse. Marmot Lake, a swampy and overcrowded mess, did NOT fulfill my expectations of the promised basin. In the end, Hart's shorter distance (0.25 miles) was the deciding factor, even though it felt like a mile. Slightly improving my mood, the terrain became stunningly alpine - boulders cemented into the ground by flowers and lush mosses. LaCrosse, which we found out later was unoccupied, apparently has the best view of all. Even so, Hart appeared quiet and still when we laid our eyes upon its silver, blue water. At least 6 parties were camped here using even fewer prepared sites, leaving John and I with this rocky spot where a small tarn had recently dried up. Given that the sun set just as our tent went up, and that we were sweaty and wearing little clothing, we became extremely cold. Attempting to replenish our body fluids with hot apple cider, we both reacted violently: simultaneous dry heaves (after which we felt much better). That John and I were both reduced to such a state should convince people never to cram 13 miles, 6500 feet up, and 3000 feet down into 1 day. As we cooked dinner, we noted several bears on the hills around the lake - most terrain covered with heather or huckleberries. The nonchalant bears grazed without regard to our presence, only slightly ambling away if we approached. We retired after relieving ourselves unabashedly in a sparse thicket near the tent. I lay freezing for some time in my sleeping bag because we never had a chance to sponge off and/or dry off in the sun. And even worse: my obsession with listening for bears above the night sounds - the light breeze, insect chatter, John turning in his bag. In the middle of the night, I actually heard and then saw a bear amble immediately by the tent door, sniffing at our gear. Indeed, LaCrosse Basin (temporarily) cured me of my fear of black bears. I was not tremendously fearful of these animals, but, rather, intrigued - respectful.



Left to Right: Anderson from LaCrosse Pass, Enchanted Valley from Hart Lake Way Trail, Anderson from near O'Neill Pass

The next morning proceeded leisurely as we didn't want to leave our finally warm beds. Upon unzipping the tent, my first view was bears munching 100 feet away. We were so exhausted that the thought of another massive day (O'Neill Pass to

Enchanted Valley and then back over Anderson Pass) seemed insurmountable. I was familiar with a cross-country traverse that would shorten our day by 5-6 miles and, given that the ranger assured us it was a piece of cake, we packed up and set off on the Hart Lake Way Trail. Navigating the way trail was not a big deal: we traveled an obvious path around the lake, and then followed a less-distinct social trail through rockier terrain and toward an obvious gap. The descent from the gap looked and was fairly daunting: 1500 feet in 0.75 mile - all down a mostly open hillside, lots of holding stubby pines as you slid down spiraling zigzags in torn, loose dirt. After negotiating a furrowed ravine, things leveled off as we crossed a tall-grass meadow. Here, there was ZERO trail and seeing/finding the way from the north would be difficult. After intersecting the obvious O'Neill trail, the descent to upper Enchanted Valley took forever, our only recourse being the commanding views over Enchanted Valley and to Mt. Anderson. After contouring the steep valley wall in thin forest (complete with startled bear) a long time, we began a series of switchbacks that dropped 1000 feet, arriving in this sun-swept cirque that rose to the spiny backbone of White Mountain. A more technical off-trail traverse, Fisher's Notch, heads from this point to LaCrosse. Within 30 minutes, we joined the Enchanted Valley trail and started climbing to Anderson Pass. One major obstacle, the roaring White River, was awkwardly negotiated - made difficult by chocolate-colored water, slick stones, and 7 anxious family members watching. Despite severe heat, we gained the mostly viewless pass AMAZINGLY fast. Removing our packs, we bathed in a tarn and then scampered lithely up the heather-flanked side-trail to the Mt. Anderson viewpoint. We walked in the windless afternoon, scanning the quarry-like landscape beneath the dirty glacier. Although Anderson's size and geology impressed me, it bore less snow and struck me as less beautiful than my first time here with Jay in 1991. After snacking, we returned to the pass, observing yet another bear. Hopes to use Camp Siberia were dashed by a huge party that gave us bad vibes. And so we retreated back down to Honeymoon Meadows, arriving just as the sun set behind Anderson Pass. Our night was not memorable, save the exceptional cold. Because the sun took so long to alight our campsite, we slumbered late before enjoying a frigid breakfast. Hiking out seemed to take a lot longer than the trip in.



Left to Right: Mt. Anderson in 1991, Jay and I at Anderson viewpoint; Enchanted Valley - first backpack, main valley

SE Corner: Enchanted Valley, May 1991

I started hiking seriously in August 1989 and, for a year, it was just simple day-trips. But then my old professor and friend, Jay, would come back from a year abroad and we began hiking together. Contrary to popular opinion, Jay and I have always been only friends - Jay being the person I most credit with defining my outdoor experience, career, and lifestyle. By Memorial Day weekend, Jay convinced me to go backpacking for the first time - to the Enchanted Valley because it was gentle, short, and snow-free early. As would always be the case, Jay did amazing preparation for this trip as compared with me, sacrificing his Thermarest (because I didn't own any overnight gear). I borrowed a crummy rectangular sleeping bag and a bad old external frame pack from my dad. For the following report, I decided to directly edit/quote from my original journals at the time: I returned last night from 3 days in the woods with Jay: 31 miles with 35 lbs on my back. I don't feel half as bad as I was expecting. I didn't expect so much of the weight to be translated to my leg muscles (although I am still walking funny). There is also a twitchy feeling between my collarbones. I spoke to Jay Thursday night before leaving (on Friday) and he seemed hesitant because the weather hadn't been great. With clouds predicted Saturday but clearing through Monday, we agreed to go for it. By Friday, Jay was a completely changed person, having put all this energy into preparing food for the trip. During the drive from Seattle to Tacoma, I stopped by REI, putting away \$150 on long underwear, a lantern, better socks, and a cute rain hat. Pulled into the family driveway around 9 with the music LOUD (my dad, washing the car, was not amused). As I finalized packing, my father surveyed the basement sprawl, finally asking whether I had the Ten Essentials (to which I knowingly smirked and said Jay was bringing those). He really glared, "you are my daughter - do YOU have them?" The next morning, my dad was up (likely on purpose) when always-gregarious Jay came to pick me up (RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT - dad always had an easier time with old Jay than any guys my age I actually dated).

The drive to Lake Quinault took longer than we both thought (although it was made amusing by groovy Deee-Lite). Driving through Hoquiam brought back childhood memories of my Norwegian relatives there... Aberdeen and its deadening small town lumber politics... endless forests blending into lakes blending into forests draped in moss. We arrived at the trailhead at 9:30 a.m. Although my pack seemed awful heavy, it compared in no way to Jay's - easily 50 pounds (amazing how much that man can carry). Given my inexperience, Jay required that we take a 5-minute break every hour (RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT - a lesson I repeat with all my backpacking virgins). The trail was a lush, beautiful repetition of the following themes: up-and-down dense forest carpeted with ferns and flowers; and flat river bottom regions that wound through sandbars beneath an umbrella of green, only the rapids drowning the silence. In between bursts of sun, a few misty rains fell. Jay (still recovering from a mild knee injury) suggested stopping short of the valley - but, in the end, we made it the whole 13 miles (1300 feet up). Just before entering Enchanted Valley proper, we crossed a little wooden suspension bridge (like a chicken run). Above, 14 elk on the hillside froze and stared back at us. We arrived at the Enchanted Valley chalet at 6:30 (8 hours after setting out). The terrain at this still-low elevation wasn't that different from anything before: flat and grassy - the rocky East Fork Quinault River to one side, fog-enshrouded peaks to the other. Dozens of skinny waterfalls careened down the stone, patches of snow tucked into the crevices. We went to look at the chalet (half serves as a ranger station, the other half

emergency shelter). Jay meticulously picked out our campsite - assessing for stones and brush that would be uncomfortable. He finally picked one in the center of the valley floor - far from the 10 or so other campsites, and separated by fallen cedar logs which were eroding into red fiber and bark. He then pitched the tent, explaining how everything worked. I will confess that I was freaked out by the small size of the tent. I mean - I knew Jay from years of school and recent hiking but I hadn't slept that close to anyone as a legal adult. Of course, Jay had seen me through plenty of freaked out moments - and I knew I'd be fine (particularly given that he didn't snore). Once the tent was set up, Jay prepared this impressive pork curry (which he had cooked down the night before). We ate by 8 and he washed the dishes in the river. Then, I sat reading while Jay disappeared to use the outhouse and visit the ranger (he learned there was an active bear in the valley). It started getting dark around 9 and we spent some time organizing the tent interior. Although Jay gave me lots of space and privacy (which I assured him I didn't need because I wasn't going to strip or anything), the tent definitely got smaller once we both settled down. Given the soft valley floor and Jay's Thermarest, I slept pretty well initially - but woke several times throughout the middle of the night, and was constantly focused on listening to every little sound.

Getting up in the cold was more difficult (we woke around 7 but weren't out until 8). We cooked oatmeal and hot cocoa, somehow managing to loaf around until almost 10 a.m. Mostly, we spent a long time just talking, watching the fog rise from the valley walls briefly - giving rise to long views of longer waterfalls. At one point Chimney peak appeared in a separating band of blue and we were inspired to hope the weather would clear completely. We agreed to stroll up the trail toward Anderson Pass but return by 1 so we could divide the trip back into 2 days. I felt brain-dead: tired after eating, cold in the face and too warm everywhere else. But the trail was easy - save a few spots where blow-down hadn't been cleared. By 11:30, we had hiked 2 miles to the world's largest western hemlock, our turnaround point. Jay insisted I hadn't eaten enough and made me eat cheese and crackers - even though I said I wasn't hungry (but still ate everything). We sat talking and snacking under the big tree for over an hour. Of course, we freely joked about cutting the cheese (as Jay bought this monstrously large block of cheddar - god knows why), extending an earlier discussion about breakfast prunes. After some more serious discussions (fraternities, military, feminism, parents, current politics), we headed back to camp. Taking down the tent went slower than anticipated. Just as Jay hoisted his full pack, he punctuated our previous cheese discussion by audibly cutting BIG cheese. Needless to say, we dropped everything and doubled over laughing. Minutes later, when Jay asked me to take his picture in front of the chalet, I purposely said, "say cheese." This, of course, caused him to drop to the ground in embarrassing laughter. We officially left the valley at 3:30, still laughing about the importance of maintaining a 12-year-old in you at all times (RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT, 1999 - I was, at the time, 23 and Jay was 34). To our surprise, many changes had been made on the trail since yesterday: fallen logs were already cleared, a couple small bridges repaired. After calming down into contemplative (or suffering) quiet, Jay hummed little tunes while I ambled along. Today, we didn't take many breaks, arriving at the unimpressive halfway camp around 7 (we'd been hoping for a flat and scenic riverside spot). Nervously continuing, we finally found a lovely place by the river at just after 8 - complete with a ring of stones. Jay was tantalized with the prospect of making a fire - which he played with for the next 40 minutes. Meanwhile, I set up the tent, fetched water, put out sleeping bags, and unpacked cooking gear. Somewhere in there, I went to find a tree - only to go in so many circles that I didn't realize how close I was to the camp until after pulling up my pants. En route, I also stumbled into a cleaned deer spinal column and skull - which fascinated Jay but freaked me out. After it started getting real dark, I told Jay to get cooking (pasta and chicken) and I took over his barely-burning flame. I got the fire pretty high but then it stifled and I lit my candle lantern. We laughed over the fact that he got more meat and I got more noodle gruel due to the fact that we couldn't see a damn thing. We agreed we should have just roasted weenies on sticks and eaten them with pork 'n beans (although the tent would have been aromatic). We washed the dishes and hurled the bear bag over a high limb by the dual lights of my lantern and Jay's headlamp. Freaked out by the shadows and sounds, all I wanted to do was get inside the tent because I knew I would feel safer. After brushing teeth, Jay waltzed in while I was taking off my hiking pants (but not the longjohns) and about fell over. With the candle lantern burning, we stuffed ourselves into respective sleeping bags and sat up talking for about an hour. I teased Jay about his goofy facial hair, dredging up memories of his returning from an old Alaska trip (with what could sort of be construed as a beard and mustache) and he could only stuff his face embarrassedly into his pillow. He countered by complaining about women (like me) who refused to shave their legs. We teasingly called one another nasty names and laughed and laughed. I know we had a few serious discussions in there - but only the silly ones come to mind.

The next morning, we didn't wake until 8:30 - and then lay there talking for over an hour. Jay said something about having a weird dream. I must have looked at him funny because he quickly assured me that I wasn't in it. Something about his car, he laughed and said he dreamed about his car a lot - that probably meant something. I confessed my dreams were usually sensual and/or explicit - adding that I didn't have any this weekend. He then stated a favorite truism of mine: that people always dream, the question is whether they remember them. I said I knew that - and that's why I always worry about the content of the dreams I remembered. And he delivered a wild grin: well, that probably means something too. I rolled my eyes and rolled back into my corner of the tiny tent. Appropriately, that's where that journal entry ended. Reading that brought back fond memories of my induction into backpacking. I forgot how kind Jay was to me on that trip; I probably wouldn't be backpacking now if that trip hadn't gone well. In March 1994, I returned to Enchanted Valley with John. Although the itinerary was the same, the food and gear wasn't as good. And I remember nothing of our conversations (alas, there are few journals from any of the years with John - which I knew, even at the time, meant something). While I still disagree with many guidebook assertions that Enchanted Valley is some mind-blowing, beautiful place with amazing views, I do reserve a special place for it among my "great" hikes - because it was my first night beneath the mountains and the stars.

Western Half: Eight Years Hiking the High Divide, 1991-1998

The High Divide remains among my top 5 hikes ever - which explains why I have done it 8 times. The views of Mt. Olympus and the Bailey Range are the finest in the park. For this condensed report, I have provided a general trip description of this hike followed by a collection of short anecdotes about each of my 8 trips. The High Divide is a strenuous 20-mile, 4200 feet up/down loop. From Puget Sound, plan on 4-5 hours driving, including a ferry from Seattle. From Sol-Duc, counterclockwise towards Deer Lake is steeper but gets you alpine faster. All my deathmarches, though, have been clockwise. Given a normal

winter, the trail is usually snow-free between early August and October. However, it can be snowed in until late August. There are hairy and steep sections that should not be attempted without climbing/route-finding experience and proper gear before things melt out. Hiking clockwise, you can expect the following: within 10 minutes, you will come to impressive Sol-Duc falls. Continuing, you will have (yawn) just over 8 forest miles before you get sub-alpine. The most boring section lasts until the obvious "high log crossing" over the Sol-Duc. Here, you will start to gain significant elevation and the trees will slowly thin. A good hour later, you will reach open meadows and Heart Lake. If you arrive at Heart Lake after 2, you are in trouble because you are not even halfway around! From Heart, you climb to the High Divide proper and spend 2 very up and down miles on the mile-high spine. Given good weather, the views are astonishing: Mt. Olympus and the Hoh River valley (south), the Bailey Range (east), and the Seven Lakes Basin (north). The highpoint is Bogachiel Peak, which will try your patience - but do not skip the summit. After Bogachiel, the trail descends steeply and on steep, difficult terrain - a key area that, if covered in snow, is impossible to negotiate safely. So - you will be screwed if you come all the way here and find impassable snow! The way eventually climbs over 2 gaps: the first provides access to Seven Lakes Basin (a dead-end for camping). The other drops out of the divide/view area and begins a very long descent to Deer Lake. From Deer, it's 4 more descending (and usually fast) miles out. Hopefully, you have iced drinks and salty, fatty food in your car...



Left to Right: Sol-Duc Falls, Mt. Olympus from High Divide proper, and from gap near Bogachiel Peak

So - why dayhike it? Camping along this route requires hard-to-come-by permits. After doing this as a 3-day backpack in 1991, I prefer to travel light and avoid foul weather. On that trip, we stumbled into a large party on Bogachiel Peak taking a naked group portrait. They also all had sweatshirts that said "Bogachiel Deathmarch," in reference to their annual 1-day version of this trip. And thus I began a similar tradition in 1992 - minus getting naked. But deathmarching is not for everyone (physically or philosophically). And if you think we're crazy... we met a bunch of women who run the thing in 4-5 hours.



Left to Right: Jay hiking on divide, looking into Seven Lakes Basin, Mt. Olympus alpenglow

1991 - Naked people aside, Jay and I enjoyed 3 days on the High Divide. We went in September - height of berries and bears. The bests: alpenglow on Mts. Olympus and Carrie, watching herds of elk over breakfast at Heart Lake. The worsts: the catwalk, a legendary scramble 3 miles from Heart Lake. Hoping to camp near said feature, we faced 2 problems: no water and a strange, eerie man who seemed to be following us. Consequently, we raced and then stumbled back to Heart Lake - our headlamp batteries dying en route. Somewhere in there, I ran into half a dozen bears at close range; the next morning, I emerged from the tent to a bear foraging 10 feet from the door. But I didn't care anymore and the bladder was going to win.

1992 - Ellen and my first deathmarch was mostly memorable because we were so thrilled that we made it after doubting our abilities the whole way around. En route, we were lectured by a couple backpacking; I snapped back at the guy: yeah - well, we won't be sleeping in the rain tonight (as clouds thickened above). Ellen and I stayed in Port Angeles before and after the trip, convinced we would take 16+ hours. Ellen, however, jogged the last mile so she could claim doing it in "under 9 hours." I came in at 9 hours and 5 minutes without jogging. On the way home, I got my first speeding ticket from Officer Kent Sheldon.

1993 - John and I repeated the deathmarch, also staying in a hotel in Port Angeles. That was my first deathmarch in a dress and the infamous sunflower hat. Aside from those sartorial memories, however, I remember little of the hike.

1994 - John, Ellen, and I repeated the deathmarch, discovering that you could actually get up at 4 a.m. from Seattle and make it home by 11:30 p.m. That is the way all subsequent deathmarches were done. Ellen insisted on wearing the sunflower hat and carrying a butterfly puppet all the way around (which she posed with among many meadows of flowers).

1995 - John, Will, and I did a straightforward deathmarch I call "black and white" (because I was shooting with said film). Will, an ecologist, was adept at identifying animals with his binoculars. Thus, we memorably watched a bear sliding down a snowfield from our vantage on the summit of Bogachiel.



Left to Right: (top) Ellen and my first deathmarch; (bottom) John (almost naked) and I in 1993, 1994 team, Will in 1995

1996 - Adam and Joel (a.k.a. the Beastie Boyz), and I set out in crummy weather, hoping the clouds would lift. But they never did - despite Adam's incessant farting (you'd think all that high pressure would have done SOMETHING) and singing Doobie tunes - the only musical group who correlated with partial clearing. Indeed, we had a fun-loving day, filled with bawdy humor and ribbing. Indeed, the Boyz did not appreciate my repeatedly pointing into the nothingness: "really - Olympus would be right there." Honestly, though, it was one of my favorite deathmarches for the company and the surreal feel of the land and sky.



Left to Right: the Beastie Boyz - on the high log crossing, and the beasts, asking "where the hell are the views, BOOMER?!?"

1997 - First off, DDG/longhair Mark should not be confused for comparable man references on this page. Mark deserves kudos for listening to my "tales of 1997" as we set the record for the longest and most stunning deathmarch. We went in late July, the divide awash in brilliant green, floral hues, and snow. We also ate incredible food all the way across: I carried fresh peaches, fancy cheese and rustic bread; Mark an entire loaf of bread, sequential pairs slathered with PB/Honey. The bad thing: I took a terrific fall below Deer Lake (burst into tears it hurt that bad). But I walked out and hardly bruised. After returning to the car, Mark (who also sports tattoos) pulled out beer and Tim's chips, and enjoyed a smoke.



Left to Right: Mark (great eye candy) along the High Divide; Jenn and I in 1998 - reviving the sunflower hat

1998 - Jenn and I completed my last deathmarch - which is remarkable (i.e. that it took us so many years to FINALLY do this hike together). Although we went the same time Mark and I went the year before, there was less snow and fewer flowers.

Amazingly, too, this was my first deathmarch in sandals - but, surprisingly, NOT by choice. Indeed, I had to wear them because I'd suffered a superficial wound on my ankle while rafting the week before.



Left to Right: Hoh rainforest, Blue Glacier overlook - High Divide in background, skeptical along the Hoh River

Western Half: Hoh River/Rainforest to Blue Glacier Under Mt. Olympus, May 1992

Although this trip is one of the most magical backpacks I have ever done, it will never be duplicated because of luck and circumstance. First, it was John and my first backpack together (during our brief, romantic, and innocent phase). Second, this trail is not snow-free until July - but the unseasonably dry winter and warm spring made our May trip exceedingly rare and quiet (i.e. hardly anyone else up there). John and I set out early on the gorgeously clear Friday before Memorial Day weekend. Our goals were to hike 12-13 miles in the first day, set up our basecamp, dayhike to/from the Blue Glacier the second day, and then hike out on the third day (total = 40, 4800 feet gained/lost). We mostly stuck to these plans. Because you gain only 1500 feet over the first 12 miles, most climbing would be via the pack-less daytrip to the glacier. Given our major drive (Seattle to Hoh = 4-5 hours), we hoped to get on the trail by 11 a.m. But, alas, crossing the Hood Canal took over 30 minutes because they opened the bridge for a submarine (a first and only event in my extensive experience). After all the delays, we got hungry and ended up eating burgers at this greasy spoon 10 minutes from the park entrance. Consequently, it was after 1 p.m. when we hit the trail. A few friends who had climbed Olympus had warned me about this hike, describing it as a 14-mile slog in the woods - no pay-off until the end. I hate to disappoint anyone - but it's true (unless you love trees). The popular Hoh rainforest lies precisely at the start of the trail: the moss-draped deciduous trees appear as cathedrals of green, carpets of fern and oxalis spread out emerald at your feet. After this first section, most of the way is in forest dominated by conifers - although we did cross a silver snag/burn section about half way up - the only place where we broke out and had minor views. The trail constantly meanders near the mighty Hoh, a churning, opaque body of blue-green water that originates from the namesake glacier. Although the trail crosses the Hoh River around mile 13, the glacier is never seen because it lives on the remote northeastern side of Olympus and no trails come close to this huge field of ice.



Left to Right: waiting for the submarine (visible in the distance), John setting out, the Hoh rainforest

In general, though, the Hoh trail is more level than, say, those routes along the Dosewallips or Elwha - which explains how we did 13 miles in 6 hours with packs. There are MANY small (though not particularly private) camps on the way up the Hoh, some of which do not appear on maps. After passing sunny riverside camps at the Hoh ranger station (9 miles in), it was difficult to push on to what we ultimately used: a dank trailside camp (with level spots for 2-4 tents total) at 13 miles. But, knowing the difficulty of the next day, we decided to sacrifice a pretty night of sleep for practicality. Even so, after seeing the ranger station area, we definitely planned to move camp down there the next night. Our first camp will strike discerning wilderness enthusiasts as too obvious and public. The trail had begun to climb away from the river, the campsites poised on a steep wooded hillside with no access to the river below. Water was obtained from a small creek/trickle 1/8th mile up the trail. Owing to the fact that it was getting dark fast, we hurriedly hung the bear-wire and set up the tents. I have to digress and laugh about John and my "good old days" of bad gear. Before John, I'd only backpacked with Jay who, being a professor (not a starving graduate student) owned top-notch gear and fostered a certain order and comfort to my camping expectations. Absent-mindedly, I assumed John would be equally geared. When John's heavy Coleman stove and giant Eureka tent emerged from his pack, I knew I needed to become an independent woman. After this trip, I forked out big bucks on my own Sierra Design tent and MSR stove. Let that be a lesson to all the women out there - OWN YOUR OWN GEAR. If nothing else, it makes break-ups and transitions easier. Oops, I didn't say that (well, yes I did - and I do). The next morning - we rose with the sun, hoisted daypacks, and started up... and up and up and up. The first noteworthy feature of the trail was the Hi-Hoh

bridge, which crosses 100 feet above the raging river where it cuts a deep chasm in the rock. After climbing through forest, we arrived at Deer Lake, which I thought would be alpine and scenic. While my recollections of the lake involve neither adjective, I was surprised to see my photograph of the lake because the Olympic peak spires are clearly visible behind a wall of trees. Several horses and mules were poised silently among the trees strung with tarps and hung with cookware, the property of a trail repair crew working at Glacier Meadows camp. I kept expecting things to open up after the lake but the trail continued through woods, woods, and more woods. Did I mention woods? At some point, we contoured along this steep hillside, crossing 4 gullies where serious mudslides and/or avalanches had recently occurred. The views from these spots were impressive, although Olympus was eclipsed by hills in the foreground. It is, frankly, amazing how tucked away Olympus is. One of the gullies scared the shit out of me because the debris had only been partially repaired and I remember walking this narrow cat-track of footprints on fresh dirt - the 45° slope careening thousands of feet down the mountainside.

Some 19 miles from the start, Glacier Meadows camp is in sight of no glacier and hardly struck me as a meadow. It was difficult to fathom that we'd spent 12 hours walking through trees and found no mountains. Hiking in the Cascades or even other parts of the Olympics typically yielded big views after 7 hours. Greeting us among the trees was the motley repair crew, most wielding buzzing chainsaws. John, of course, started up a conversation with these guys about environmentalism, the logging industry, and recent unemployment trends on the peninsula. This made me nervous - given the actively buzzing chainsaws and all. Anyway - there were 2 viewing options from camp: 0.5 miles to the snout of the Blue Glacier (down) or 1.0 mile to the upper moraine (up). I knew the latter offered the most spectacular vista of the entire Olympus cirque. But that was the longest mile I have ever walked. Seeming to go straight up, the trail immediately broke into alpine rock, meadow, and some snow - the final ridgeline in view, eclipsing the full view of Olympus. I clawed up, resting every few steps. On the final narrow ridge, I earned the most awe-inspiring view I'd seen in years. We ate lunch, joined by cavalier mountain goats: scruffy mom, teenager, and too-cute baby with snow-white fur. Mom was bold enough to approach my pack, necessitating I shoo her away. Owing to the sun, blue skies, and overabundance of flat rocks along the moraine, I decided to take a nap. Meanwhile, John went off exploring. After awhile, I was abruptly awakened by a thundering sound. Roaring down the rock face adjacent to the climbers' route up snow dome was a waterfall of avalanching snow. Mildly concerned about John, I began to scan all over for him. Well - I found him: John had made his way down the impressive moraine and was in the middle of stamping my name out in snow (easily 15-foot high letters). However, he misinterpreted where the glacier actually began and thought he was on just a snowfield adjacent TO the glacier. As was clear from this vantage, he was actually walking in the direct line of many crevasses. I called to him several times to no avail. Sufficed to say, concerns that he would plunge to his death on, like, the last footprint of the "H," played in my head. When he finally returned and looked down, he could only shudder. Nonetheless, that's probably the most original (not to mention dangerous) thing anyone has ever done for me in the name of Romance. I tell people that story with a light humor in retrospect but, in all seriousness, what could have happened that day was bad. John would tell the woman ranger about the incident back at the visitor center when we returned and receive a mild chewing out. Climbing friends, however, have laughed at the story, insisting that the crevasses on the Blue are paper-thin.



Left to Right: (top) Deer Lake, scary gully, mountain goats; (bottom) final views of Olympus cirque and more goats

I have no clue how many hours we sat there just soaking in the mountain scenery - the WHOLE place to the goats and ourselves. It seemed like an eternity. The weather, though, was changing and we knew that we were lucky because all the peaks across the valley (High Divide and Bailey Range) were shrouded in clouds. Occasionally, a strong wind would gust up the valley and we would have to don our jackets. The next day it would be raining by afternoon - continuing all week. I remember nothing about the descent to camp except having this beady-hempy granola couple (these were the days before EVERYONE wore bead/hemp necklaces, mind you) hand me my fleece hat, which I had apparently dropped. Once we arrived at camp, we packed quickly and moved down to the lush Hoh ranger station camp. Here, we built a fire (well, John "threw it together, doused it with camp-fuel, and lit it"). The next day, we headed out somewhat early, arriving at the car by 2 p.m. It had JUST begun to sprinkle. We dashed into the then under-construction visitor center/bathroom to change and share stories with the ranger. Although I felt this hike was decent haul, hiker friends of ours who went up 2 weeks later said it was WAY hard. So

I don't know. I was a scrawny 24-year-old chick at the time. I've vowed to go back but never followed through because there are so many other interesting places to go. Or maybe I avoid it because of all the history. Or maybe it's because we achieved perfection of the first trip. Or maybe it's just because I can't see hauling myself through 19 miles of trees for JUST that view and then not have a man risk his life for me to write my name in the ice.



Left to Right: Lake Beauty and the south face of Mt. Olympus, various shots along Skyline proper

Western Half: Skyline Traverse, September 1995

Skyline Ridge is notoriously described in guidebooks: phrases like extremely strenuous, difficult route-finding, and not for everyone juxtaposed beside alluring comments suggesting its utter beauty and remote solitude. Knowing all this, and having climbing experience, John and I had included the Skyline as the final section of a north to south crossing of the park (August 1994 - see NE Corner). Given problems with that trip (i.e. bailed halfway across at Dosewallips), we tried just the Skyline 1 year later (August 1995), only to have bad weather force us off. A month later/September, we woke up at 5 a.m. and headed out from Seattle to try again. The Big Creek trailhead for the Skyline is near the terminus of the North Shore Road by Lake Quinault. After 7 miles on Big Creek, the primitive Skyline route officially begins, proceeding for 20 miles before hitting the North Fork Quinault. And then it's 16 miles back to the North Shore Road terminus (with 0.7 road miles back to Big Creek/car). The drive to Lake Quinault took over 3 hours - most through fog (the weather in Seattle the last week). At the Quinault ranger station, the attendant was apprehensive, insisting there was significant, ice-axe-requiring snow on Promise Creek Pass (we brought only ski-poles). We headed out anyway because sometimes you have to trust your experience. As we approached the trailhead, the fog burnt off, revealing clear skies along the lakeshore of Quinault.



Left to Right: Three Lakes area, "Shake Your Groove Thing" Three Prune Camp, heading onto the Skyline proper

We started hiking at 9:30 a.m. The first day's hike was predictable and boring. The Big Creek trail (at 500 feet) climbs gradually through forest and swampy areas, contours along a moderate forested slope above the river, and drops to cross the river. From here, it climbs very steeply, eventually becoming more moderate as it hits the 3000-foot forest/meadow region. During our August attempt, several parties here expressed surprise and dismay at how difficult the grade was for them. But it was what I expected, based on experience with Olympic trails. The trail became boggy as it meandered through the forest and meadow, finally arriving at Three Lakes (7 miles from the start). Said lakes are more like swampy tarns with lots of bugs and frogs and a few official campsites nestled in the tall grass and short trees. The views were not great, in my opinion: just down the sylvan rolling hills and valley. This meadow is the "official" terminus of the closed Tshletsky Creek Trail (a strange obsession of Jay's). The official start of the Skyline is just beyond Three Lakes and so we continued, our goal being Three Prune Camp (5 miles away). The trail to Three Prune Camp was obvious, although moderately up and down (an appetizer for things to come). We ran into many big downed trees with which to wrestle full-body (they usually won) as we contoured through the woods. We gained a notch that looked down onto a meadow basin with small Reflection Lake and a couple unofficial campsites. We contoured and climbed to another notch that offered big views north: forested and rocky ridges, the massive Quinault River valley. The terrain was more open, dotted with shallow, silver tarns and unofficial camping bald spots. The trail meandered, climbing and dropping in moderate increments, over the next mile where it reached a junction with the Elip Creek way trail (the steep escape/connector trail we used in August to get off the ridge and back to the Quinault under near-flood conditions). Today, though, the skies were clear and blue - the boots bone dry. The trail meandered another 1.5 miles before reaching Three Prune Camp. At some point, we reached a minor highpoint and gasped at Mt. Olympus, our first view of its south face: incredible, despite being half eclipsed by a ridge in the foreground. At around 5:30, we arrived at Three Prune, a giant bald spot right off the trail. In an emergency, at least 6 tents could fit there (last time, there were 5 crammed

when we arrived and we enjoyed the endless hysterics and flatulence of 12 male compatriots searching for humor and meaning during our 14 hours of solid rain). This time, Three Prune was silent, peaceful, and unoccupied. We placed our tent centrally with an awesome view over the valleys and rolling ridges, the sky turning rosy, the sea of fog ebbing up the valley like a massive finger-like tide. My only complaint was that my 2-day old county fair-acquired cold had not gotten better despite all this fresh air. Thus, I spent the evening (and most evenings thereafter) medicated, the only obvious side effect: discoing in ONLY my booties to "Shake Your Groove Thing" - which I somehow managed to get in my head for 4 days straight.



Left to Right: Promise Creek Pass, the most cairn-free section of the Skyline, Beauty Pass

The next day was clear but we knew we had our work cut out for us. It was 12 miles to Lake Beauty, our next planned camp, and 8 were described as highly strenuous, difficult route-finding dilemmas. Several Skyline-experienced friends (climbers and rangers) had severely warned us that this long, hard day would take 10 hours (and they were correct). Thus, we arose at 6:00 a.m. after a fair sleep (accompanied by the vigilant hoots of a nearby owl). The trail was obvious for the first 3 miles, the only difficulties being many blow-downs and a few obliterated ravines. Views along the mostly tree-covered ridge were limited. We heard many rounds of elk bugling eerie screeches. We ran into our first party - a gnarly, well-honed male/female pair ending a 9-day trip that had involved some major climbing and traversing off-trail from Enchanted Valley over Mt. Christie, down to Low Divide, and now out the Skyline. They were highly skeptical of our plans to go to Lake Beauty in a day, emphasizing many route-finding problems they had just dealt with (mostly trail-less boulder fields). But we continued, having not yet been deterred in our plans by anything thus far. We eventually arrived at South Kimta Basin, a large meadow bowl surrounded by medium peaks, meadows, and talus. Guidebooks firmly state to keep your eye on the route for cairns at all times. Occasionally the trail did vanish in rocky or grassy areas but small rocks were piled to keep us in line. John and I were never really sure which exact knob along the ridge was Kimta Peak (supposedly the tallest). After crossing the meadow-dotted bowl, the trail narrowed and began side-hilling on steep (30°) meadow. Usually afraid of such open and sloping vistas, I was pleasantly surprised that I accepted this terrain with no vertigo issues. After a mile, though, I was exhausted and concerned about our incredibly slow rate. We crossed several steep talus basins, a few of which had precarious footing, exposure, and/or small patches of icy snow. We topped off on the ridgeline occasionally - gaining unobstructed views of Olympus and Queets Basin. Overall, the way contoured just below the spine - but always up and down. Except for snow, water was nowhere - a point the guidebooks made and for which we had prepared. Finally, we came to a creek/spring next to a couple of unofficial camps, indicating we were just beyond Kimta Peak. As also predicted, we began to descend, side-hilling on terrain that began to bother my sense of height and openness. We met a lone man who claimed he'd been on THIS trail, going in OUR direction, for 10 days; John and I were fairly certain, however, that he was totally stoned (and had been for at least 10 days). Frustratingly, we then started climbing, contouring through an ugly burn - complete with numerous blow-downs and long stretches of muddy ruts that actively comprised the high-angle trail. We did see about 20-30 elk, the fauna highpoint of the trip. After a brief level section, we began an even more defeating climb to the highly anticipated Promise Creek Pass - where, of course, there wasn't ANY snow. Nonetheless, the nearly 1000-foot climb was steep, hot, and took forever. We grew cranky and uncertain about the realities of getting to Beauty that night. When we finally got to the pass, it was a let down because Olympus was nowhere in sight... rather, this MASSIVE talus basin flanking Mt. Zindorf to the east (alongside Mts. Seattle, Meany, Noyes), high meadows to the north, and this boulder-strewn terrain to the northwest (the route we would take). We sat down and caught our breath for a while, studying the maps and reviewing guidebook descriptions of what lay ahead. The next 2 miles represent the most challenging terrain of the whole traverse. For long stretches, there were no cairns and little visible track. Initially, the terrain was not very steep, traveling rolling mounds of rock slabs, boulders, and sedimentary strata thrust perpendicular. Looking up toward the ridge, the strata reminded me of an amphitheater, the columnar rock forming rows upon rows of seats, the breathtaking geology surrounding us in gigantic cathedral-like proportions. Tiny cairns were located anywhere from 50-500 feet apart and most required exacting detective work to find. There were small patches of snow with melt-out tarns for water. At some point, we scrambled up to the ridgeline, to an unofficial campsite guidebooks call High Camp. Here, an unobstructed view of Mt. Olympus can be enjoyed (were I to do this again - which is unlikely - I would use it). Beyond, the way headed gradually down and, for about 30 minutes, we lost the cairns entirely. But we knew that the way proceeded down - eventually contouring into cliffy terrain. John shot down this moist, mossy creek bed set in stone. Near the bottom, he picked up cairns and an obvious boot-beaten track. I 5-pointed my way down the ravine to follow (no style points).

The next mile to Hee Haw Pass was EXTREMELY trying. Even so, the trail was obvious, howsoever poor and strenuous: contouring through meadows with minor ups and downs and then cutting into sharp, dry rock chute/ravines (this motif repeated 4-5 times). The entry and exit from each chute was consistently steep and edgy, the trails narrow and/or eroding completely away. I remember gingerly walking on this particularly exposed hard dirt section - ball bearing rocks underfoot everywhere, 30 feet of empty space down the naked chute below. There were other places where tree roots held thin, holey balconies of dirt out over the ravine. I got sewing machine leg several times. After generally losing a fair bit of elevation during the ravines from hell, we then had to climb Hee Haw Pass, a grassy open flat spot in the shadows of a now-5 o'clock September sun. On the other side, little silver tarns and game trails emerged in the meadows below. But we stayed high, gradually climbing to

Beauty Pass, the last pass of the day. We marveled at Olympus and then descended a very steep trail (500 feet/0.3 mile) to the obvious lake. With little direct sunlight left, we bathed along the sunny side of the lake. Standing barefoot and sloshing cold water over myself, I was actually stung by one of those water boatmen (and bitten by numerous mosquitoes). We returned to our campsite and proceeded to set up camp on a flat grassy site right off the trail (1 of only 3 obvious spots at the lake), Olympus partly visible. To the west, we could walk up a small knoll to look back on the Queets-facing side of Skyline Ridge, Kimta Peak obviously towering. Across the valley, the toothy Valhalla's appeared insular as the fog again rolled up the valley. As the daylight receded, the sun turned blazing orange, painting the clouds brilliant pink. A small tarn beneath the knoll, surrounded by meadow and a few trees, stunningly reflected the sunset colors. We dined many times throughout the evening: appetizers (cheese, salami, pretzels, and carrots), soup, and chicken & dumplings with vegetables. John also consumed most of the cinnamon apple compote, which he rated highly but I thought tasted like organic solvent. Although our sleep was restless, we were entranced with the brilliant stars (we chose not to use the rain-fly, an error because the air was so damp). Given large peaks to the east, direct sun did not hit the camp until nearly 9 - leaving damp gear wet and cold. Even so, I awoke eager to explore the next day. Beauty Lake is set in a deep pocket - green and blue with interesting underwater topography. South of the lake lay meadow and rock, including quartz amidst the flaking sedimentary rock. From a large knoll north of the lake, the views of Olympus were unobstructed and beautiful - all the peaks (Valhalla's, Olympus, Meany, Noyes, Seattle) appearing as islands above the fog. If you stared carefully, you could see the pea-soup bulges of fog were actually moving (receding to the Pacific). On the way back, we visited our 2 neighbors. Both were heading out to complete the Skyline, although neither were tackling our mileage and thought we were insane to have done it. No respect, man. We then enjoyed a small breakfast of prunes and bagels before packing. Our neighbors had made me nervous about the trip down to the Quinault, insisting there were really treacherous sections coming up. Our climb back up Beauty Pass took an eternity, and left us tired and irritable. At the pass, the fog was rising, creeping up and lapping at it like a flood-zone. The first mile down was like a baby version of the ravines from hell - with one extremely steep section featuring a full-on root ladder. We wondered what our neighbors were going to think of the REAL ravines from hell. We then entered the fog, the landscape becoming lush and dotted with tarns. Although I should have been annoyed at the lack of views (and they would have been ridiculously amazing), I was filled with a strange sense of fulfillment and satisfaction given the day prior - lucky to have been given the weather we had. I felt equally entranced by the mystery endowed by the magical, thin fog. Having done yesterday's hike with many ultimately wrong expectations, I felt that here I was on a section I hadn't researched as much, which didn't fill me with any anxiety - and I was moved with the newness despite the lack of views. For the first time on this trip, I wasn't looking over the entirety of the park but, rather, admiring the closeness of the grass and rocks, the misty tarns and babbling creeks, the surprising hues of blossoms still flowering after the late melt summer.



Left to Right: descending into the fog from Lake Beauty, at the Low Divide ranger station

We descended to a large creek that originated from partly-visible Mt. Seattle. Then we gained about 800 feet, reaching a meadow basin - fresh, steaming piles of bear shit everywhere. We meandered through the clouds, gaining and losing minor elevation through the boulder-strewn terrain. Finally, we started truly descending - mostly easy except for a few muddy, wet bogs with slick rocks. We also crossed another large creek via boulders (it poured down through a narrow chasm of nearly vertical rock). After 8 miles, we joined the North Fork Quinault River trail in a huge meadow of long yellow. Several waterfalls gushed from the rampart-like walls in the Mt. Seattle vicinity. Low Divide camp and ranger station were 5 minutes north and so we went there to eat our emergency chicken curry dinner for lunch (which required breaking out the stove). Afterwards, we hiked 4 miles downriver to "12-mile" camp - non-monumental except for a run-in with a skittish horse tied to a tree right by the trail. Because the bridge across the large Quinault River was out, the park service had tied a holding line across a wide, shallow section (20 feet across, 2-3 feet deep). Uninterested in getting our feet wet, we found some slick logs and rocks by which to cross downstream (many footprints lead the way). We were notably alone at camp, a lovely set of half a dozen sites under big trees beside the river. We built a roaring campfire with driftwood found near a logjam just downriver. While we were searching for wood, we stumbled onto a plastic baggie of weed. Someone (the lone hiker from day 2?) had left it in a big dimpled knot at the end of this giant ancient tree that had fallen halfway over the river. We joked about burning the weed in our fire but - mostly at John's insistence - we decided to leave it alone. The night was warm, despite the fact that we'd never fully aired our still-damp sleeping bags. The next morning, we headed out early, hiking 4 miles before eating breakfast. Although I ate an entire box of pistachio pudding, this did little to energize me and I spent the remainder of the day lethargic. The last 3 miles were more tiring than any other section of the trail, despite their simplicity. On our way home, we dined on ultra-greasy food at this cafe west of Lake Quinault. In summary, our total mileage was 45-48 (depending on which map and guidebook you use) and 8500 feet gained/lost. While the route-finding was about what we expected, I agree with guidebooks on many counts: foul weather or snow coverage would create serious problems, and not carrying a map/compass would be bad in the event that the route was lost. I'd rate many sections as class 2-3 scrambling (i.e. required hands-on climbing, exposure where you could get hurt if you fell). Snow on these extremely remote sections would be very dangerous and rescue in the event of an injury could take a long, long time. Standard cell phones also do not work most places in the Olympics. As for solitude, I think we had it pretty nice on our trip in terms of quiet and peace. Of course, our previous August

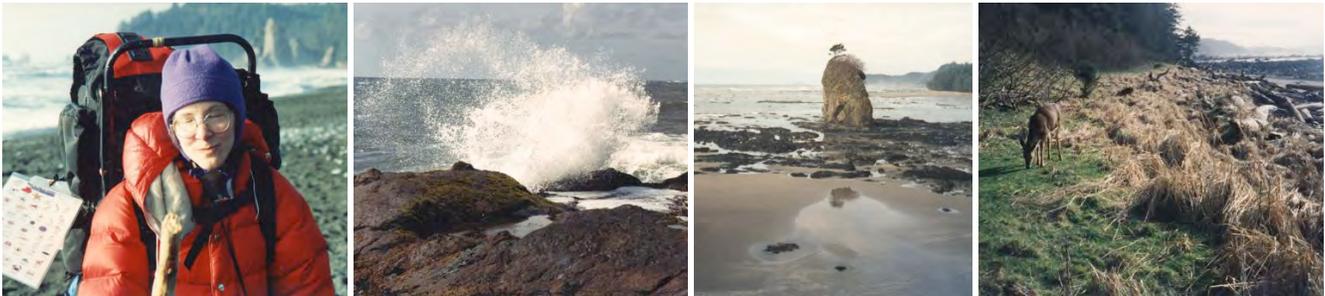
night at Three Prune was likely more representative of a pre-Labor Day visit. One internet guy told me he did the trip late August (the year before) and had to fight 14 parties vying for the 3 spots at Lake Beauty. Interestingly, the rangers claim that only 75 parties successfully do this traverse annually (mathematically, 1-2.5 per night during August/September). I guess my final comment would be that I would certainly not try this trip in 4 days again - although this itinerary was based on 2 parties we knew who did it as such, the guidebook's "4 days minimum" recommendation, and our utter fear of crappy weather moving in given our interesting past experience with the route. Frankly, though, it was hellish.



Left to Right: Lake Mary at Low Divide, Elkhorn cabin, Elwha River

Western Half: Across the Olympics - Quinault/Low Divide/Elwha, August 1996

This is a trip I cannot recommend if you want alpine views - even though it is easier than nearly most everything else in this collection. It is also an important historic route (read Wood's excellent [Across the Olympics: the Press Expedition, 1889-90](#)). For this trip, we originally set out to hike to Low Divide and then scramble the technical Elwha snowfinger and Bailey Range (exiting via the catwalk/High Divide). At the time, I figured I'd have an easier time crossing the catwalk after being scared shitless for 5-6 days. Anyway - 2 things messed up our plans: I wore new Vasque Superhikers that accepted crampons (recommended for the snowfinger and southern Bailey's). Although I thought I'd broken them in, they blistered half my toes in 2 days (repeated in Patagonia 6 months later). Second, when we arrived at the snowfinger, terrified scramblers said it was an impassably holey mess (global warming, you think?). Thus, we escaped down the Elwha, retreating via Lake Mills (total mileage = 45, 2500 feet gained/lost). Obviously, you need 2 cars or patient friends willing to shuttle you back.



Left to Right: Sarah north of Rialto, wave north of Rialto, headland overlook north of Rialto, deer along Sandy Beach

Coast: Beach-Hiking 101

Hiking and backpacking Olympic National Park's pristine northern coast section will challenge, delight, and confound your every expectation. This brief section summarizes a variety of lessons I have gathered over the years, most paid for dearly via mistakes, frustration, and neuronal death. First and foremost, every party needs appropriate maps, directions, warnings about headland crossings, and, above all, a current tide table (in addition to the usual survival essentials). In general, park brochure maps will provide adequate information about the all- important headland crossings. Patience, especially with the tides, is the best virtue on the Olympic coast. For every headland, there are four basic types: (1) insurmountable under all conditions; no overland trail (avoid these completely); (2) insurmountable at high tide; no overland. Wait for tide to go out (seriously, you have to wait!); (3) insurmountable at high tide, overland. Haul ass up so-called route; (4) surmountable at any tide level; overland trail (the BEST). Overland trails that bypass cautionary headlands can be accessed regardless of water level. However, most overland trails are gnarly. Many do not adhere to official grades, levelness, or evenness, nor do they bestow good levels of comfort. Many consist of rope ladders - wiry, flexible suspension bridges, some with wooden planks. The whole thing is thrown down a 40-60° dirty, rotting face from the top or near the top of the overland. You simply walk up or back down the ladder, hands and all in place. A remarkable number of shoddy-looking ropes have been added to these overland trails. In some cases, you hold onto a rope while backing down from the headland via a moderate and sloughing dirt slope before actually reaching the beginning of the ladder.

Coast hiking does not follow a defined trail, except where headlands or connections between the road and the sea have been beaten into the muddy earth. All such trails are indicated by large, fairly visible circular wooden signs painted with a red/orange and black motif - a quartered circle - nailed high in the trees by the trail access point. There are no mileage markers and, frankly, the coast has a way of confounding the sense of distance because, at least for me, rounding major headlands seemed to take an eternity. Park brochure maps never did much in the way of predicting when a safe zone/nice sandy beach would be met based on my perception of the shape of the land or my interpretation of the map cautionary notes because most headlands are more complex than rounding a single sharp angular cliff; most proceed along a rippling vertical curtain of high angle rock and dirt such that rounding one corner simple leads to another and another and another (i.e. one "caution" on the map equals 1-10 actual rough spots). Without an obvious trail, you are left self-navigating, a skill that took me awhile to

master. Initially, my gut wanted to hug the land during low tides but, really, the easiest walking entails proceeding on the biological carpet of tidal pools and shelves out away from the land - cutting B-lines out from the headlands in an effort to shorten and ease the distance. I found that the terrain nearer the land had more boulders and logs and, consequently, more body-contorting elevation gains. Of course, farther out you have to deal with the squishing, popping sounds of stepping on living plants and animals. At the same time, though, the vibrancy of anemone and kelp, sea star and chitin, silvery purple-shelled arthropod and darting fishes are, in themselves, worth the stroll out away from damp land. Frankly, for a backpacking trip, I would recommend that, if you have never hiked a rugged coast before, that you double the time you expect to take.



Left to Right: the route can be anything – sand, ladders, rope, or rocks, or slippery tidepools

Several rivers feed into the sea - big ones like the Hoh have no bridges and are un-crossable by foot; smaller ones like Goodman Creek or slightly-larger Ozette have no bridges but can be forded under most low-tide conditions - generally near the waves given that rivers braid as they meet the sea. If you don't know how to ford rivers in general, then you shouldn't attempt crossing such rivers on the coast. As for camps and water, I found these to be equally tricky to locate my first time around. There are relatively few established campsites along the coast that are named on a map - big ones like Sandpoint and Cape Alava, and smaller Cedar Creek come to mind. All of these places share the common feature of being near a moderately sized stream that flows year round and having a significant number of carved-out campsites. Such sites, however, may not be workable given tide timing. Backcountry permits and park regulations make no explicit specifications regarding where to camp beyond the popular, high-impact dayhiking destinations (such as Sandpoint). Between the headlands are many small beaches with unnamed sites tucked here and there into the trees, most given away by ropes and styrofoam debris hanging in the trees like flags - likely thanks to weary hikers taken aback by the arduous rounding of things like Cape Johnson. The idea that you will be camping in the sand amidst nice dry driftwood constructs is an ominous farce once you see that the tide often makes it right up to the forested edge. Be safe. Go for the trees. At such sub-optimal sites, lack of water will prove problematic (and remember, you cannot drink salt water - it will only dehydrate you more). If you are stuck with such a site, get those headlamps out (because it will probably be dark by then) and search everywhere for the smallest, most dingy looking seep and sponge off whatever you can get that runs off the dry land. Whatever you get may taste and look ugly but it will do - add some punch mix. As for fires - they are allowed - but build them out in the open down by the gravel or sand, not amidst big piles of driftwood. While there is certainly plenty of wood, though, don't count on things being dry (i.e. - absolutely bring a stove).

Finally, arranging transportation in order to complete a thru-hike trip going, say, from Rialto to Ozette, is the last problem facing backpackers headed for the coast. One solution is to find another willing party with a car. You go north and they go south, trade keys en route, and meet up afterward to sort out the cars. Alternatively, provided there are at least 2 car-owners in the party, drop one car off at one trailhead and then head back to the other... repeating the whole process upon return. Keep in mind that such an arrangement can add another 3 hours to the driving time. Legend has it that some peninsula dwellers actually taxi hikers for a fee and that the names of such individuals can be obtained from the rangers - but I have not used these services. Lots of people I have met indicate a wrong and dangerous expectation that they are going to come out and hitchhike around the peninsula. Honestly, the distances are vast, the towns are few and far between, and there is not a lot of traffic, especially on the beach access roads. Unfortunately, public transportation doesn't exist. Finally, rumor has it that cars are frequently broken in at beach trailheads but I have yet to experience this problem, despite parking 2 cars for 4 days at a time at least twice for backpacks, and innumerable times for daytrips.



Left to Right: John and my Ozette to Rialto traverse

Coast: Rialto – Ozette Traverse

Rialto Beach, north of LaPush, is reached via a good road and an official park entrance. Consequently, it is extraordinarily crowded. Picnic facilities abound but no camping is allowed on the immediate beach. There is a drive-in campground at Mora, 2 miles back in the trees and along the road. Beach camping is allowed at Ellen Creek, a 1.5 mile hike from Rialto. The region between Rialto and the Ozette Lake access point, 20 miles north, represents the longest stretch of protected virgin coast in

Washington (and supposedly the lower 48 states). However, the region is punctuated by logging roads and unofficial social trails, and so this section is not really so untouched. Frankly, I have yet to figure out how to access these roads as they all seem to be gated. I can only surmise that key-holding individuals comprise main users. Discussion of these entrance methods with rangers led, on at least 3 occasions, to very animated outpourings, indicating that such use is illegal and of concern to park staff. It is worth stating, though, that if you happen to encounter an open gate and choose to drive through it, hoping for that easy entry, you might come back to a locked gate and be stuck. Better to take a mountain-bike, a very good county map with logging roads, and a compass, if such activity is your intention. Rialto/Ozette section is an interesting, rewarding, and beautiful hike that I have done twice, both in spring: once north to south and once the other way. It requires a significant amount of driving, particularly when there are just 2 of you and you have to do a car shuttle. In both cases, I and my hiking partner (Jay or John) placed respective cars on each end. My first trip shaped most of my overall impressions about coast hiking (and its pitfalls); the second time was much improved, reflecting lessons learned. Both trips involved 3-day backpacks, as is the recommended time, and can be done year-round; most guidebooks recommend avoiding winter hiking since storms can be hypothermia-inducing and tides can soar.

My first backpack up the coast (with Jay) was hectic and will be the report focal point (to which my second is compared within this narrative). On this trip, high tides peaked at 2 a.m./p.m. - NOT ideal. Planning ahead and choosing a time when the low tides are earlier or later in the day is extremely important. Although the thought of stopping for a mid-day siesta was appealing, I knew Jay could be impatient and stubborn - and I consciously remember telling him something to the effect of: "I don't want to find myself stuck on some cliff with the sea lapping at my feet so let's agree that we're going to stop long before getting into that kind of trouble." Hiking with someone mellow is also good idea for a beach trip. Nonetheless - foreshadowing and all - Jay and I left Rialto around 1 p.m. and headed up along the sand, passing Ellen Creek Camp and then the impressive Hole-in-the-Wall (worth a day trip in and of itself). Under mid-tide conditions, one can actually walk through the hole via rough barnacled stone. Otherwise, there is a headland trail (which we had to use). Just beyond Hole-in-the-Wall is a great rocky beach region with an incredible stone shelf that has this striped relief pattern, reflecting the sedimentary geologic nature of the peninsula. When the tide is low, this shelf can be walked forever and admired for the innumerable pools that occupy its clefts.

Farther down, the first of several cautionary points began - no overland trail, low-tide crossing only. The land juts to the sea as a rocky mass, its nearly vertical walls 75° up relative to the water. Jay, no less than 2 hours from the car, suggested breaking our first agreed-upon rule. Fortunately, we didn't get very far with what was literally class 2 scrambling. We spent the next 2 hours sitting on some ledges above the receding waves, most time spent shooting down Jay's ideas to continue with what appeared to be class 3 scrambling. We began again when the tide was medium-high, traveling slowly by hugging the small available shoreline of wet, super-slick smooth, rounded boulders and logs. On a map, this section is marked by a single CAUTION; one might be, as were we, misled by how far the warning actually extends. Thus, when we rounded the first big pseudo-cliff and returned to a safe but rocky beach, we figured we were done. In reality, we encountered at least 3 more tight-fit cliffs, interspersed with small beaches, before nightfall. We had been anticipating finding the Chilean Memorial, one of 2 key memorials erected to honor sailors who died along the obviously rugged coast, 3.3 miles from Hole-in-the-Wall. Feeling we'd definitely hiked that far, we assumed we'd missed it and were well beyond Cape Johnson (a hairy, cliffy area just past the Chilean Memorial). With the sun nearly down, however, we had to bed down at an unofficial but definitely used site amongst the trees. The best running fresh water source was a trickle coming down the very dirty, muddy headland we'd just passed.



Left to Right: John and my Ozette to Rialto traverse – including Chilean and Norwegian Memorials

The next morning, we tried to get up really early to hit the low tide. Within an hour, we came upon the Chilean Memorial, blowing our spirits. The memorial consists of a rectangle-shaped block with the names of deceased crewmembers, all set on a grassy knoll above a rocky beach. We continued slowly, realizing, then, the worst of our fears: Cape Johnson still lay ahead. Indeed, we climbed over slimy, huge boulders and logs, hugging the shore despite the yards and yards of adjacent, flat tide pools. Over the course of this massive, trail-less, multiple rounding, we would evolve to cut out onto the shelf of tide pools, learning how to walk anew: avoiding the purple stuff, not freaking out over all the pops of algae. About 2 hours later, we concluded that the Cape was behind us, indicated by an obvious doublet of overland trails. Around noon, we arrived at Cedar Creek Camp, a lovely green site with a makeshift three-sided cabin, a big running creek of fresh water, and a pit toilet. But we had to press on given that we were VERY behind. After crossing another headland, we reached the Norwegian Memorial. This memorial is pinnacle-shaped, complete with Norwegian and American flags at the base - all set in a protected clearing in the woods. Beyond here, a long cautionary spot was passed at mid-tide: an extremely narrow (15 feet) beach when we arrived, with soaring rock and dirty cliffs rising high above at 60-70° angles (not something I'd like to clamor). The shore here was extraordinarily littered - debris tossed from ships was washed seemingly everywhere: Jay, who had just spent a year in Japan, found a half-full bottle of what had been his favorite Japanese shampoo, making for a good laugh. Later, we found an American flag shredded into a tattered skeleton of ribbons (which Jay briefly wore like a prize fighter as he trudged along,

shampoo in hand). This was followed by gentler beaches prior to reaching Yellow Banks. The banks are exactly that - soaring yellow banks that fully block the view of whatever lies beyond. We arrived there around 2:30 p.m. and, once again, Jay wanted to press on. We watched a large man, huge camera dangling around his neck, hug the cliffs as he attempted to round the headland, all the while the waves at his ankles. I said: NO WAY IN HELL. We surmised this guy had been day-tripping from nearby Sandpoint and was running for the crossing because he knew it was short, having just come from that direction. Given this, I eventually agreed to climb the headland - not via the now-submerged coast but, rather, via a woody ravine that cut into the land beneath the soaring banks. We followed a faint game trail through the brush, heading due east. Midway up, we managed some class 2 scrambling up dirty, muddy earth that pulled out in handfuls and bootfuls with each step/crawl. Surprisingly, we topped out in relatively open woods and decided to have a snack and discuss our options. Over lunch, we came to the incredibly short-sighted decision that, hey, we were less than a mile from inland Lake Ozette - why not bushwhack to the lake, make camp, and follow its shore until we got to another known trail for an exit? I will always analogize this decision to that of a fly that gets suckered down one of those funnel-shaped carnivorous plants with the spikes that are smooth heading in but pointed and deadly when the fly finally decides it has had enough.

Like the fly, we headed into fairly open woods - due east. At first, the mild thrashes were humorous. But things became exponentially thicker and, 4 hours later, in an entirely disoriented state, we were convinced we were going to die - or spend a week stuck in the "impenetrable thicket" (Jay's verbatim assessment of the situation - a phrase that, to this day, makes me laugh insidiously). Over 10 years later, this experience still goes down as my most frightening moment outside (with a few close seconds, nevertheless). Unable to come to a consensus regarding where we were, what direction we were heading, what direction we should head, how far we'd gone, and - having suffered innumerable mild nervous breakdowns - we agreed we would only go west and get the hell out. Nearly out of water, Jay was together enough at some point to have filled his Nalgene bottle with coffee-brown water from a tannin-stained seep we stumbled upon at least 3 times (owing to the fact that we were traveling in circles). Within an hour - covered with scratches and bruises - we arrived at a brush-edged cliff. We decided to travel south along the cliff, taking down the first reasonable-looking ravine - which we found within 30 minutes. I remember sliding a muddy seep, ferns slapping me, mud up my shorts - everywhere. We arrived at the shore just after the sun vanished below the horizon - the sandy beach adjacent to a fairly large headland. While I kissed the ground, Jay ran around the headland (given that the tide was now at its minimum point), and came back in hysterics over the fact that RIGHT around the corner was Yellow Banks, just as we'd left it 6 hours before. The irony of that moment will live fondly but dubiously in my memory until I die. A lone unofficial campsite was found 5 minutes away but no water could be located. We bedded down, dehydrated and hungry, carefully doling out the quart of emergency water. Jay had to force a slurry of drink mix and boiled seep-water down my throat; the taste was so bad, I gagged repeatedly.

After little sleep, we rose late and headed out. Given that we were less than 5 miles from the car, we took the official 4-mile trail to Ozette Lake (this leads to a remote corner of the lake, accessible only by boat or this trail). Ditching packs, we headed up the muddy, mostly planked trail - gasping at the wall of flora that surrounded the trail - a veritable tunnel that eclipsed the sun. How could we have thought we could bushwhack through this? The trail opened to a marshy lake edge and we lunched, greeting 2 canoe campers making their way around the perimeter of the HUGE lake. Canoeing is a popular multi-day outing given that Ozette is one of the largest lakes in the state. We returned to the ocean and made the brief hike back to Sandpoint, a major beach camping destination (3 miles from the parking lot/road). Currently, popularity is so great in this region that overnight visitors are regulated and you pretty much have to write in advance to obtain permits for summer weekends. Sandpoint is a stunning, open, sandy beach that curves in a giant crescent, the blue waves contrasting with the lush green forest adjacent. A grassy, dirty knoll can be climbed for a fabulous view up and down the shore. Jay and I, our ordeal complete, stopped here for the view before hiking back to the car. I had to take a full day off work to recover once I got home, though. North of Sandpoint, via Cape Alava, comprises part of great loop, called the Ozette Triangle. A year before, Jay and I had done this as a dayhike, and so we were content to skip it during our longer backpack. Most of the 9 miles involve forested or prairie-like terrain - often planked or muddy - to and from the beach. The 3 miles between these points lie along the beach and can be done under all tide conditions (no sand ladders or ropes, too!). Cape Alava, the northernmost point, is famous for the Wedding Rocks, a petroglyph-ed site of weddings for native Makah. Nearby, a recent storm/mudslide revealed a massive ancient Makah village; subsequent excavations have sent thousands of relics to an impressive museum at Neah Bay, a reservation town in the northwestern-most corner of the state, also worth a visit. We observed a remarkable amount of mammals - eagles, raccoons, deer - on this dayhike, despite seeing virtually nothing during three full days backpacking.



Left to Right: John and my Ozette to Rialto traverse – most shots near Ozette Triangle

When John and I repeated the full backpack, we started at Cape Alava and headed south. The only relevant things I'll mention are: first, we enjoyed a culinary feast by carrying thawed game hens and roasting them, stuffed with garlic and herbs, over an open fire at the end of the day along with asparagus, stuffing, and gravy. Second, we went a bit earlier in the spring, albeit

under fairly clear conditions. Nevertheless, it was cooler and windier - and we found our gear (much of which was foolishly cotton, as we were poor graduate students) to be constantly damp and cold, exacerbated by the fact that we never had an opportunity to dry everything in full sun. Even more problematically, we always had to wear it because of the cold, exposing it more to the windblown surf (can anyone say: hypothermia?). Third, we used every low tide opportunity to explore the tide pools. The best, by far, are about 20 minutes beyond Hole-in-the-Wall. These lie on a huge shelf which has a 5-7 foot drop-off into the thrashing sea during its lowest tidal point; this mini-cliff is interrupted variously by these narrow surge channels flowing with white surf and masses of mussels. When we were there, we watched a guy standing on the edge to take a picture literally knocked to his feet by an incoming wave. Frankly, he was lucky he wasn't dragged over the edge to a no-doubt brutal drowning. Finally, our second campsite, just down from Cedar Creek, was interrupted severely by an overload of unofficial campers who had driven in from the logging roads and hiked in to Cedar Creek, carrying firecrackers and other battery-driven noisemaking devices, thus making the point, again, that the coast is not without problems.

Coast: Shi Shi Beach

The official road and trail into Shi Shi from the north (at Neah Bay) is closed indefinitely. Unofficially, local residents who live along the road will let you park your car safely at their homes (for a fee) while you hike to the legendary beach. It's your call. Alternative tales of biking or hiking logging roads from Ozette to Shi Shi from the south have also been communicated (and look possible on maps) - but I have not found that these work. The only truly legal option is one I haven't done: hike in from the southern beach at Cape Alava (reached via trail from Ozette). Two massive problems make this route unappealing and dangerous: fording LARGE Ozette River, and rounding massive 2.2 mile Point of the Arches. I have heard mixed stories about this venture: one ranger said it was hard but doable; another said we'd be killed trying to do it; some guidebooks say it should be left only to climbers with ropes, ability, and agility. But I can't tell you any more because I have not done it and I have no plans of doing it. I have made 3 trips or trip attempts to Shi Shi: (1) John and my successful route in using unofficial Neah Bay folks (below); (2) Jay and my unsuccessful attempt to bike logging roads up from Ozette (following directions of a friend of mine who claims to have done this route in); and (3) Jay and my successful backpack in from Neah Bay.

Journal of Results Which are Undesirable to Repeat

Author's Note: Thanks to my film being run through the wash, we are unable to provide documentation of this both historic and unhistoric trip to Shi Shi Beach. While we do apologize, we probably don't regret it too much because the rain was falling constantly sideways into the camera lens and the pictures would have sucked!

We report herein the findings of a recent experiment to test original hypotheses presented by the Mountaineers et al. regarding the accessibility, difficulty, and aesthetic nature of a coastal region of Olympic National Park defined as Shi Shi Beach. This region, a structural subdomain of the larger "coastal strip" is situated near the northwestern-most corner of Washington State. Technically off-limits to scientific - or other - endeavors, Shi Shi Beach remains in a state homologous to patent limbo due to access roads being owned and maintained by the Makah Native American Tribe in Neah Bay, the adjacent establishment. Whether Shi Shi is a technology with marketable potential remains to be seen but, until the development of controversial proposed supporting infrastructure (i.e. guest services near the trailhead), the region will likely remain technically-off-limits from the northern short access trail. Intrepid investigators with the appropriate skills, equipment, and tide conditions (either that or expert swimming ability and hardware) are cautiously reminded/informed that legally approaching from the south within the National Park (specifically from Lake Ozette) is a possibility, albeit long, grueling, and potentially dangerous (Olympic National Park rangers, personal communication)

Materials and Methods

Transportation: We employed a variety of transportation mechanisms to access Shi Shi: Washington State Ferry System; 1988 Toyota Tercel Wagon; blistered and bunioned - but always trusty - feet.

Media: Nutrient broth consisted of coffee, tea, hot chocolate, orange juice, and water. Solid media was supplied by one or more of the following: plain donuts, New York Peppermint Patty, PayDay, Gala Royal Apples, Nabisco cheese and cracker snack, Safeway GORP mix, and Gummi worms. Antibiotics and medicinals included Septra, Seldane, Ibuprofen, and Sudafed.

Equipment: We used a variety of outdoor products for safety and protection: Patagonia and REI Goretex or Goretex-like parkas; Patagonia nylon pants with inner Capilene and full side zips and REI coated nylon pants; Columbia Sportswear Supplex/Goretex wide-brimmed rainhat and REI fleece cap; Vasque or Raichle midweight leather hiking boots, mid- to expedition-weight long underwear (REI polypropylene or Patagonia Capilene), nylon shorts and wool socks with polypropylene liners (REI). Time and elevation were measured using an Avocet altimeter watch; direction was checked using a Silva compass; emergency items included those recommended by various standard protocols (REI headlamps with batteries, REI candle and windproof matches, first aid essentials such as Band-Aids, painkillers, and sunscreen, and survival oriented gear such as a signaling mirror, knife, and Glad trash bags for emergency shelters). All items fit into a large-size Lowe fanny pack (in addition to the many parka pockets available).

Results

Driving: The Neah Bay vicinity was reached after approximately 5 hours of driving and ferrying from Seattle, Washington. For our route, we traveled via I-5 to Edmonds, Kingston via the ferry, Highway 101 to Sappho, 112 to Neah Bay. Initially, the route from Neah Bay to Shi Shi appeared straightforward, as evidenced by an obvious signed road in the middle of town. However, several unsigned paths were encountered thereafter. The first involved a choice between a concrete bridge over the Sooes River or a straight land road; we took the former and were correct. The second, encountered one minute later, involved the choice between an uphill left path or a level right one. Initially, we chose the former but were mistaken. The third involved the

unmarked trailhead itself; we passed it, proceeding to the dead-end fisheries center, and backtracked to a blue gate with several warnings regarding vandalism (verbatim, these stated: "Cars will be vandalized").

Parking: There appeared no official trailhead parking lot and negligible, visible parking space along the muddy, rutted dirt road. Several dirt inroads lead back into the woods, some of which were marked with "no trespassing" signs and others of which looked reasonable for parking (though still probably visible and likely in violation of property rights). We decided to drive back down the road 0.5 mile to one of several Makah homes alongside an off-limit private beach and pay for presumably "safe" parking in one of their grassy yards, following the standard protocol recommended by several others (Mountaineers, Machlin, rec.backcountry). Obvious advertisements for such purposes were posted variously at three homes. A sum of \$5.00 was exchanged - recommended per diem - for services with a friendly man with an expensive red sports car.

Hiking: Following the walk up the road, hiking proceeded from the blue-gated road via a wide, increasingly muddy dirt road that ran parallel to several recently logged areas. Refuse was profuse; analogously, the National Park kiosk and trail registry at the official park boundary was a vandalized mess of splintered wood and shredded backcountry permits. For approximately 1.5 miles, we hiked through increasing precipitation that was quantitatively correlated with two qualities: (1) puddle-size and (2) boot-suck-ability of the mud. Previous literature defined a possible loop trip that consisted: of (1) finding a steep side-path leading off the road and down to the northern end of Shi Shi beach proper; then (2) hiking southerly down the beach 2 miles; and finally (3) meeting up with the road-end (which apparently slopes down to the beach) near the mouth of Petroleum Creek. Hoping to duplicate these methods, we were lead astray repeatedly by trail-like paths, sometimes marked with ribbons and boot-prints. Fortunately, our ultimate bushwhack attempts were minor as compared with previous collaborations (Boomer and Mueller, "The Impenetrable Thicket"). Eventually, we found a more convincing branch trail - with ribbons and boot-tracks - that lead to an obviously park-constructed trail that was steep but reasonable. Descending 300 feet, we arrived at what appeared to be the northern terminus of Shi Shi (a substantial boulder-heap headland to the north seemed unroundable, consistent with maps and literature). The beach proper extended south about two miles, a perfect crescent with a vast and nearly flat sand bed. Unexpectedly, the land rose sharply behind, with copious trees, shrubs, and brush. The weather was persistently horrible: continuous rain, wind in our faces, a low mist ebbing at the ocean edge and virtually enshrouding the famous southerly feature, Point of the Arches - a punctuated peninsula of rock constellations that scatter out from the boundary headland. Soaked to the core, we sincerely feared hypothermia could set in and were careful to continuously eat and drink. En route - also to our surprise - we observed thick bluish white smoke emanating from the trees: a quartet of campers huddling beneath plastic tarps draped variously, our only company for the day. Shortly thereafter, Petroleum Creek was crossed, John crossing via a hefty log jam and I via boulders in the braiding channel (and, in my case, not without fully stepping into the rather high water at least once). However, despite much searching, John was unable to locate any semblance of a trail or road-end in the vicinity. We continued to the Point of the Arches, awash with the tide and affording little room for exploring what lay around the jutting headland. We walked back in the rain - the wind on our backs - to the marked trailhead we descended previously and returned. The total mileage was approximately 8-9 and our time was about 4 hours. During our walk, we observed several species of fowl and beast: half a dozen bald eagles, shrill killdeer, gulls; perhaps a hundred dead or dying jellyfish washed up variously in the wet sand (with the rising tide), a large dead chitin (8 inches long) curled up like an armadillo, and - by far the most interesting - a purse-like shark egg case (10 inches long) with a fist sized embryo compartment. We did not dare open or poke at the egg, however. Indeed, it was a Joycean display of life and death at the water's edge.

Discussion

Shi Shi beach is frequently touted as the finest beach in Washington (Mountaineers literature). Previously described beaches that hold highest esteem in our eyes include Second Beach, Rialto, and Sandpoint (near Ozette), also within the Olympic National Park. Comparatively, Shi Shi is a sandy beach - like Sandpoint and Second Beaches. In general, I found them all equally beautiful: Second Beach receives higher marks for tidepools, though not as high as those near Rialto. Sandpoint and Shi Shi are similar, though Sandpoint is overall flatter, with virtually zero elevation difference between the beach and the surrounding forest. It is difficult to assess crowdedness at Shi Shi, given the unpleasant weather and early season timing of our visit. Certainly, from an aesthetic standpoint, the beach deserves further visitation. The Shi Shi hike from Neah Bay is not difficult - although problematic trail conditions (severe mud, colossal puddles, little signage) were frustrating. Stumbling around to locate north beach access trail was moderately annoying and many dead-end paths lead to brushy edges posed a general risk of getting lost. As with most beaches, too, bad weather in combination with the wind and surf has the potential to create hypothermia conditions.

The accessibility of Shi Shi is perhaps the most problematic and unresolved aspect of the trip. Blatant vandalism and garbage is alive and well in this corner of the state. After our visit to the beach, we stopped at the Port Angeles Olympic National Park Visitor Center and chatted with a familiar ranger for some time - openly confessing that we had visited this off-limits area. To the park service, accessing the beach from Neah Bay is virtually illegal (although it seems that most of this has to do with legal problems between the Makah over the access roads - and the park simply not wanting to take responsibility for any liability/altercations involving tribal lands). The ranger did indicate that tensions within the Neah Bay community existed over the fate of the Shi Shi access area. Apparently, members (implied to be the same who threatened "Cars will be vandalized" on the gate) not only target cars near said gate but also vandalize cars parked in the "pay lots." Vandalism was also defined not in terms of mild window-breaking or thefts but, rather, entire trees being forced through the length of the car. Thus, politics appears to be the primary motivation - with economics certainly a close second (if not the original causality). Listening to this as a somewhat innocent bystander, it was difficult to know how much was true or who was really doing what to whom and why. We simply are telling our piece of the ongoing saga that is Shi Shi beach. I wish I could answer the question of what to do or how resolve the issues - without turning the beach into a zoo - but I don't. That's why it's RE-search.