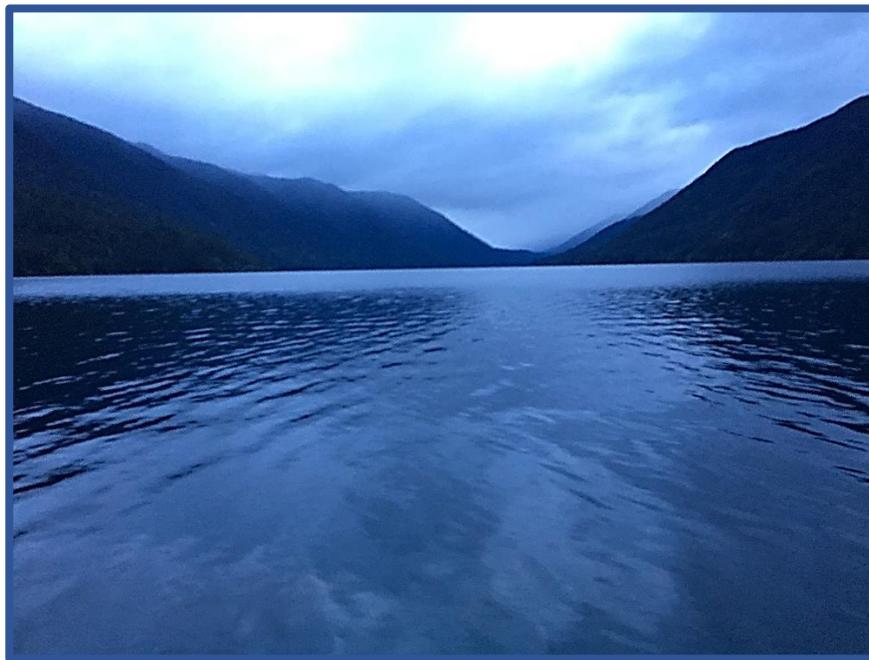


Washington's Olympic Peninsula June 2-10, 2018 with Woody Wheeler



Washington's Olympic Peninsula – June 2-10, 2018

Guide: Woody Wheeler with Fred, Joan H., Joan Q., John, Linda, and Pat



Lake Crescent

Day 1: Arrive to Seattle: Jack Block Park; Alki Point; Dinner at Salty's

Everyone was raring to go by 4 PM, so we headed directly to Jack Block Park under blue skies, sunshine and 70-degree temperatures -- exceptional spring weather for this time of year in Seattle.

We arrived at Jack Block Park, a scenic restored beach and strip of vegetation along Elliot Bay with a fabulous view of downtown Seattle. Several Osprey flew by, including one with a fish that landed and dined on his catch. Our first trip hummingbird, an Anna's, few into shrubs along the park pathway. On the waterfront, we found our first alcid of the trip with its shockingly red feet – a Pigeon Guillemot. Loud barking from Elliot Bay led to a buoy with where California Sea Lions basked and vocalized. A Harbor Seal peered at us from the water, its head glistening in the sunny conditions.

Washington's Olympic Peninsula

June 2-10, 2018 with Woody Wheeler

Cedar Waxwing browsed on Red Elder Berries and a lone California Scrub Jay flew overhead twice. We were off to a good start, including great views of Seattle, Mt. Rainier, the Olympics and Elliot Bay. In addition, we still had time for a short driving tour to Alki Point along its busy beach filled with Seattleites, soaking in the summer sun after a long, gray, wet winter. We paused to take in the views of Puget Sound before passing through West Seattle to Salty's Restaurant where we enjoyed a sumptuous seafood feast. Fresh Halibut, King Salmon and Steelhead were among the evening's choices. We headed back to the hotel at sunset ready to begin our circumnavigation of the Olympic Peninsula.

Day 2: Seattle to Nisqually NWR; Hoquiam Ponds; Lake Quinault Lodge

We departed for Billy Frank Nisqually Wildlife Refuge, arriving while the birds were still singing. The refuge, named for a prominent Puyallup Indian who fought for salmon conservation and Indian rights, features 3,000 acres of woodland, riparian and tidally influenced habitats which we explored. The first bird species we saw was a Downy Woodpecker from the car as we entered the refuge. From the observation deck at the visitor center, we saw several types of swallows: Tree, Barn and Cliff. The swallows had built nests on the visitor center buildings that were busy with their family activities.



We then walked through a riparian forest area, taking note of native plants along the way including salal, salmonberry and Thimble berry. The woods were full of song, especially from Swainson's Thrush, Song Sparrows, American Robins, Yellow Warblers, and Black-headed Grosbeak. A few in our group saw a Brown Creeper near the beginning of the trail, and later saw two more. It was hard to get good looks through the dense tree canopy, but ultimately, we did see Swainson's Thrush, Willow Flycatcher, Western Wood Pewee, Common Yellowthroat and Yellow Warbler. We also heard the Pacific slope

Flycatcher and the Olive-sided Flycatcher in several locations.

At the Nisqually River overlook, we saw a female Common Merganser with her speckled brood of 5-7 young. Just when Woody said the young like to ride on the mother's back, two of them jumped on her back for a short ride. We watched them across the river for some time, enjoying the scene as they swam in and out of the understory, all the while trying to hitch a ride on their mother's back.



Continuing down the trail, we encountered two more Willow Flycatchers and had our first look at a Rufous Hummingbird. We also had good views of Black-headed Grosbeak and Yellow Warblers as they darted in and out of Blackberry Bushes.

Washington's Olympic Peninsula

June 2-10, 2018 with Woody Wheeler



As we approached the twin barns, we had a small flock of Cedar Waxwing and two Purple Finch. From here, we headed along the trail toward the boardwalk. We were serenaded by Common Yellowthroat and Savannah Sparrow, we heard many of each but did not actually see either until our walk back on the same section of trail. Here we also saw a Bald eagle and several Mallards in flight, as well as an unusual siting of 35 Great Blue Heron flying together in a large flock – perhaps a rookery evacuation prompted by a marauding Bald Eagle.

From the board walk, we had a large group of Ring-billed Gulls feeding in the mudflats. Double-crested Cormorant swam nearby. A lone female Hooded Merganser preened on a tiny mud island. We heard the plaintive cry of Killdeer and heard the raspy call of Caspian Terns flying above.

We headed back and walked a different stretch of wooded trail. More Swainson's Thrush sang. We saw a Red-faced Slider turtle sunning on a rock near a large beaver dam. Black-capped Chickadees, Cedar Waxwing and Song Sparrows were in the area, including two adults of the latter species feeding a young Song Sparrow. As we neared the parking lot, rain clouds loomed overhead. A Rufous Hummingbird perched conspicuously at the top of a small cedar – a brilliant flash of orange against the sky. This left a lasting impression of our refuge visit.

We drove south to Olympia and then west toward the coast as steady rain fell. Midway to Aberdeen, we stopped for lunch at a picnic area where a White-crowned Sparrow perched and sang. A Western Tanager sang its full-throated song from the tops of surrounding conifers. We finished our lunch and continued west through the blue-collar towns of Aberdeen and Hoquiam. Just outside Hoquiam at the entrance to the Bowerman Basin National Wildlife Refuge, we stopped at two treatment ponds. One was filled with waterfowl, including Lesser Scaup, American Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, Cinnamon Teal, Green-winged Teal and Gadwall.

From here, we drove through forested hills into the National Forest near Lake Quinalt. The great size and diversity of the trees were apparent at the entrance to this area. We pulled into the lodge in the late afternoon, moved into our rooms, then met for drinks and checklist compiling prior to enjoying another delicious meal.

Washington's Olympic Peninsula

June 2-10, 2018 with Woody Wheeler

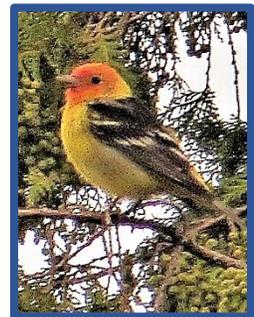
Day 3: Lake Quinault - Massive Sitka Spruce, old-growth trail, 4th Beach & Kalaloch



Appropriately in a temperate rainforest, we awoke to a light misty drizzle. As soon as we started hiking toward the world's largest Sitka Spruce, the rain stopped. On the way we had a great look at a Pacific Slope Flycatcher perched on a limb illuminated by the sun that broke through the clouds. Band-tailed Pigeons flew by and Western Tanagers sang from atop the tall conifers. Then we turned to cross a small wooden bridge and a view of the giant Sitka Spruce opened up. What a sight to behold! It required three incremental looks, craning the head further each time, to take in the full size and scale of this tree. We pondered for a moment how many creatures inhabit this monster tree.



Nearby we finally had a good look at a Western Tanager in the surrounding Douglas Fir trees. John wanted to see a Hairy Woodpecker, and much to his and our delight, three flew in to a small snag near the stream across from the giant Sitka Spruce. Cedar Waxwing fed on Salmon Berries, and Vaux's Swifts flitted overhead. A Pileated Woodpecker call resonated in the distance.



We then headed to a place with even more big trees in the Quinault Rainforest. At the start of our walk, a Golden-crowned Kinglet came in close, its golden crown flared out as it sang in its high-pitched song. As we hiked into the cathedral forest, multiple ferns appeared: sword, deer, maidenhair, lady,



Washington's Olympic Peninsula

June 2-10, 2018 with Woody Wheeler

licorice and bracken. Then came the giant trees: Douglas Fir, Western Hemlock and Western Red Cedar, all on a steep hillside naturally landscaped by ferns, shrubs and small trees with a stunning creek below. We paused to learn about the elements of a temperate old-growth forest, then as a small rain shower passed through were visited by some of its inhabitants, including a Pacific Wren, Wilson's Warblers, a Brown Creeper and a Black-throated Gray Warbler.

Following these lovely woods walks, we headed toward the coast. Our drive was delayed by an adult and fawn Black-tailed Deer on the highway. The parent kept trying to coax the fawn to leave the highway and enter the thick vegetated hillside. The fawn seemed to prefer the roadway, galloping awkwardly and defiantly along the pavement. This went on for some time, until we eventually took a slow wide sweep around the two deer, hoping to convince them both to return to the forest. The adult did, but the fawn continued galloping down the road, undeterred by cars and its irate parent.



After witnessing this remarkable spectacle, we drove through the Quinault reservation to a series of numbered beaches, stopping at #4. By this time the rain had stopped, the sun was out and the temperature in the mid-60s. We had a picnic lunch then hiked down to the beach where we encountered Pelagic Cormorants, a Common Raven and a juvenile Bald Eagle, along with the picturesque wild beach with its distant sea stacks.

On the way back to Lake Quinault, we stopped at Kalaloch where Purple and House Finches sang and perched, three species of swallows flew erratically in their endless quest for airborne insects, and Pelagic Cormorants perched on rocks offshore in the surf. Several mature Bald Eagles perched on massive Sitka Spruce trees overlooking the ocean.

It was time to return to the lodge, enjoy a drink and dinner in the restaurant haunted by FDR who in 1938 announced the creation of Olympic National Park in this building.

Day 4: Ruby Beach, Hoh River Rainforest, Lake Crescent

Our day began on a cool, cloudy morning, without precipitation. Bolstered by a substantial breakfast at the lodge, accompanied by multiple Rufous Hummingbirds on feeders, and a male Brown-headed Cowbird pecking and posturing at his mirror image in the window, we loaded up the van and headed for Ruby Beach.

While taking in the stunning views of the sea stacks and beach, we noticed a perched Band-tailed Pigeon – our best look at this species with its strikingly beautiful plumage.

Washington's Olympic Peninsula

June 2-10, 2018 with Woody Wheeler



As we hiked down to the beach, a Pacific Wren hopped onto a branch 15 yards from us and gave us a concert version of the longest bird song in North America.

Purple Finches, Orange-crowned and Wilson's Warblers joined the chorus. A Rufous Hummingbird posed elegantly.



We hiked the rest of the way to the beach and surveyed the sea stacks and rocks just offshore. A small group of Pelagic Cormorants and Pigeon Guillemots perched on a surf-splashed rock. Farther south on another off-shore rock a Black Oystercatcher perched on its highest point. Then several others called noisily before landing on the beach and another rock. A mature Bald Eagle circled above as we hiked back uphill. In thick Salal and Salmonberry bushes, an Orange-crowned Warbler circled, landing briefly on various branches. As we climbed to the hill top, Cedar Waxwings foraged through the berries. This attractive bird has been our daily companion.

Our luck with the weather has been good. It seems that it rains during our drives, but not during our hikes. A rainy road spell during our drive to the entrance of the Hoh River brought us face-to-face with a female Roosevelt Elk. She crossed the road in front of us, then browsed 10 yards from the right side of our vehicle. We took pictures while she gobbled ferns and leafy shrubs.



At the Hoh Rainforest, we set out on the nature trail through the Club-Moss draped forest. This walk is mesmerizing with its many shades of green, towering trees, and multiple layers of ferns and other vegetation. We stopped to look at an open stretch of the Hoh River where several Spotted Sandpipers flew upstream with their stiff wing beats, then walked, bobbing up and down as they went, along the rocky river bank. Upon exiting the one-mile plus loop trail, Fred commented that he wished we could

Washington's Olympic Peninsula June 2-10, 2018 with Woody Wheeler

keep on going. Fortunately, on this trip we hike through temperate old-growth rain forests often.



On the way north and east, we stopped in the logging town of Forks where we found a surprisingly good Italian Restaurant that had fresh, tasty and authentic dishes.

The final driving stretch was through tree farms, forested hills, and at the end, along the shore of glacially-carved Lake Crescent. We arrived just as the sun broke through the clouds. Two young Black-tailed Deer bucks grazed on the lawn between the lodges where we were staying.

Day 5: Sail and Seal Rocks, Cape Flattery, Makah Museum

The glassy smooth surface of Lake Crescent with blue skies overhead told us all we needed to know: This was the ideal day to go to Cape Flattery, a place known for its stormy, wet and windy weather. We took the scenic route, winding up hill past the log cabin resort up over the north ridge of the lake to the road to Pysht and then Clallam Bay. From here the road hugs the coast of the Straits of Juan de Fuca. It too was calm and smooth – an unusual condition for this huge, tidally-influenced body of water. Our first stop was at Sail and Seal Rocks to check for birds and marine mammals. Pelagic and one Brandt's Cormorants were gathered on Seal Rock, along with Glaucous-winged and Western Gulls.



Washington's Olympic Peninsula

June 2-10, 2018 with Woody Wheeler

We continued on to the Makah Indian town of Neah Bay then drove to the Cape Flattery trailhead. On the hike we heard Olive-sided and Pacific-slope Flycatchers. The beautifully handcrafted cedar plank trail leads to breath-taking views of the wild Pacific Coast. Here we saw scores of Pelagic Cormorants with a few Brandt's and Double-crested Cormorants. Common Murres, NW Crows, Glaucous-winged



and Western Gulls completed the scene. A large group of California Sea Lions and a few Elephant Seals sat on a rock north of Tatoosh Island, and a small pod of Orcas swam west in the Straits of Juan de Fuca, their 6-foot dorsal fins signaling their presence from far away. Pat called this trip "a hike of a lifetime." Joan Q called it "one of the most spectacular places in the U.S." We stopped on the way back in Neah Bay to visit the impressive Makah Tribal museum. Everyone found it fascinating and worthwhile. Just outside the museum, five Bald Eagles perched and vied for territory in the tall fir trees.

Day 6: Marymere Falls, Hurricane Ridge, Ediz Hook



Calm and overcast weather greeted us this morning. After an always generous breakfast at Lake Crescent Lodge, we set out for Marymere Falls trail head, only a mile distant from the lodge. The hike got off to an auspicious start when we found two Yellow-rumped Warblers moving through the Big-leaf Maple trees, accompanied by a Warbling Vireo. Not far down the trail, a Varied Thrush appeared beside the base of a large Western Red Cedar tree only 15 yards away.

Next, we saw our first Douglas Squirrel of the trip. This one hid in vegetation beside the trail after first being plainly visible in the trail. We searched in vain for Dippers in the creek, and then ascended the cedar plank stairs to the falls view point. This 75-foot cataract with a mossy backdrop draped with maidenhair ferns never disappoints.

After this pleasant hike, we drove into Port Angeles for a delicious

lunch at Toga's Soup House. It was a good thing we arrived early, because there was standing room only at this popular restaurant by the time we departed.

Washington's Olympic Peninsula June 2-10, 2018 with Woody Wheeler

From here we drove up to Hurricane Ridge, at first in clouds and drizzle, but gradually we emerged from the clouds and had clear views of the snow-capped Olympic Mountains.



As soon as we got out of the car on Hurricane Ridge, we saw multiple Black-tailed Deer on one side of the road and several endemic Olympic Marmots on the other side, gathering grass and standing sentry.



Horned Larks moved through the mountain meadow. One was taking a dust bath and another was flying high into the air, vocalizing and then

plummeting downward in a dramatic breeding display. A Gray Jay patrolled the visitor center.

We walked above the visitor center over several patches of snow, taking in the scenic beauty and noting early wildflowers including: Glacier Lily, Self-Heal, Indian Paintbrush, Lomatium and Smooth Douglasia. At an overlook near the trail's high point, we saw seven Mountain Goats from afar including one with a "kid" goat in tow.



Washington's Olympic Peninsula

June 2-10, 2018 with Woody Wheeler

On the way back down from the ridge, we stopped at an overlook. The clouds had broken up sufficiently to reveal a terrific view of Puget Sound, including Dungeness Spit, Protection Island and Discovery Bay— places that we will either visit or be close proximity to in the days ahead. As we were leaving this spot, a buzzy song revealed the presence of a Townsend's Warbler. This particular male sung from the crown of a Douglas Fir in bright lighting. Everyone enjoyed scope views of this brilliantly-patterned warbler.



We continued down the mountain into Port Angeles. In the late afternoon, we drove out to Ediz Spit, the landform that forms the city's harbor. It was unusually calm for a place that is subject to strong winds from the Straits of Juan de Fuca. Soon we spotted dozens of Harlequin Ducks perched on floating logs in the harbor.



Then two Kingfishers were calling noisily and flying over the harbor.

Farther out on the spit, we saw a small group of birds toward the middle of the harbor, Surf Scoters, with one smaller bird beside them – a Rhinoceros Auklet in breeding plumage complete with plumes and tusk.

Near the Coast Guard station at the end of the spit, we checked the Straits of Juan de



Fuca for sea birds and were happy to find another Rhinoceros Auklet and a Marbled Murrelet, preening and floating so that everyone could see this threatened bird in the spotting scope – the grand finale to our day.

We returned to another fantastic meal at the lodge and retired for the night full of memories of the Olympic splendor that we had been fortunate to witness.

Day 7: Pt. Townsend, Kah Tai Wetlands, Fort Worden, Oak Bay, Fort Flagler, Mutiny Bay



Washington's Olympic Peninsula

June 2-10, 2018 with Woody Wheeler

A vigorous rain storm passed through in the morning, following an unusual dry spell. We ducked out of the rain under a shelter on the Port Townsend waterfront, watching sea birds go by, including Pigeon Guillemot, Rhinoceros Auklet and Pelagic Cormorants. Then we stopped at Better Living Through Coffee to warm up in their cozy coffee shop where you can literally bird out the window.



As we strolled along the trail at Kah Tail Wetlands, the weather broke. A nice variety of waterfowl graced the ponds: Ruddy Duck, Gadwall, Hooded Merganser, and Mallard. Several species of swallows, sparrows, and blackbirds and a hyper-active, vocal Marsh Wren completed the scene. A Virginia Rail let out a few loud grunts. Several Black-tailed Deer walked by in relatively close proximity.

We moved on to scenic Fort Worden under improving weather conditions. At Point Wilson light house, Pigeon Guillemot, Rhinoceros Auklet and a Common Loon flew, swam or drifted by in the fast-flowing tidal currents. We then stopped in Port Townsend's Courtyard Café for a very nice lunch with fresh ingredients, homemade breads and soups. After lunch, we headed to Oak Bay County Park where the weather improved to full sun, warm and calm conditions. Multiple Great Blue Herons plied the shorelines, Bald Eagles soared above, and an Olive-sided Flycatcher called in the distance. Some locals harvested pickleweed. They told us it is a natural salt that they use in cooking. Under increasingly sunny skies, we continued north to Marrowstone

Island, pausing at a wetland isthmus between Indian and Marrowstone Island where Killdeer congregated. Then we pulled into Fort Flagler State where a Cougar had been sighted only a day ago!



We hiked the beach and out a rocky spit to a view of Rat Island. Hundreds of gulls were nesting there along with at least a dozen Caspian Tern. The eyes of at least a half-dozen Harbor Seal were upon us as they drifted by 50 yards offshore looking quite relaxed. One had half-closed eyes and let out a yawn while half-heartedly keeping an eye on us. Pat, who has a keen eye for marine organisms, found a red-orange jellyfish on the beach.

Our last stop was Mystery Bay State Park, a nice little harbor and boat launch with riparian habitat and a small slough. A Band-tailed Pigeon perched conspicuously on a Douglas Fir, as did a male Kingfisher on a different tree. Then we relaxed and enjoyed the calm, warm afternoon and the view of the bay. As John said, maybe the mystery about this bay is that so few come to this park in spite of its beauty and serenity.

Washington's Olympic Peninsula

June 2-10, 2018 with Woody Wheeler

To cap off our pleasant afternoon, we parked in Port Townsend so everyone could explore this small city with all its eclectic charms. In addition to its turn of the century Victorian architecture, bookstores, art galleries, antique shops and eateries, this particular weekend featured a "Steam Punk" festival. Many festival participants walked the city streets in elaborate historical costumes. They seemed to fit well with Port Townsend's motif, and they provided additional entertainment.

We had an especially delicious final dinner at the Fountain Café in Port Townsend before driving back to Sequim. A sun shower produced a rainbow to further enhance the dynamic evening skies – a fitting end to a spectacular trip..



Day 8: Return to Seattle and Flights Home

Images of snow-capped peaks, moss-draped temperate rain forests, wind and wave-swept wild beaches with towering sculpted sea stacks inhabited by multiple unique birds and mammals will remain with us forever. The world-class scenery came with a healthy dose of freshly-caught sea food, prepared skillfully and tastefully by fine restaurants along the way. And then there are the eclectic logging, port, tourist, hippy, Indian and even New England-style towns along the way. We also experienced local cultural venues ranging from a world-class tribal museum, to an Italian diner in a logging town, to a classic hippy coffee house called Better Living with Coffee. A scenic ferry ride provided the final passage from the Olympic Peninsula to the mainland.

Report and photos by Woody Wheeler