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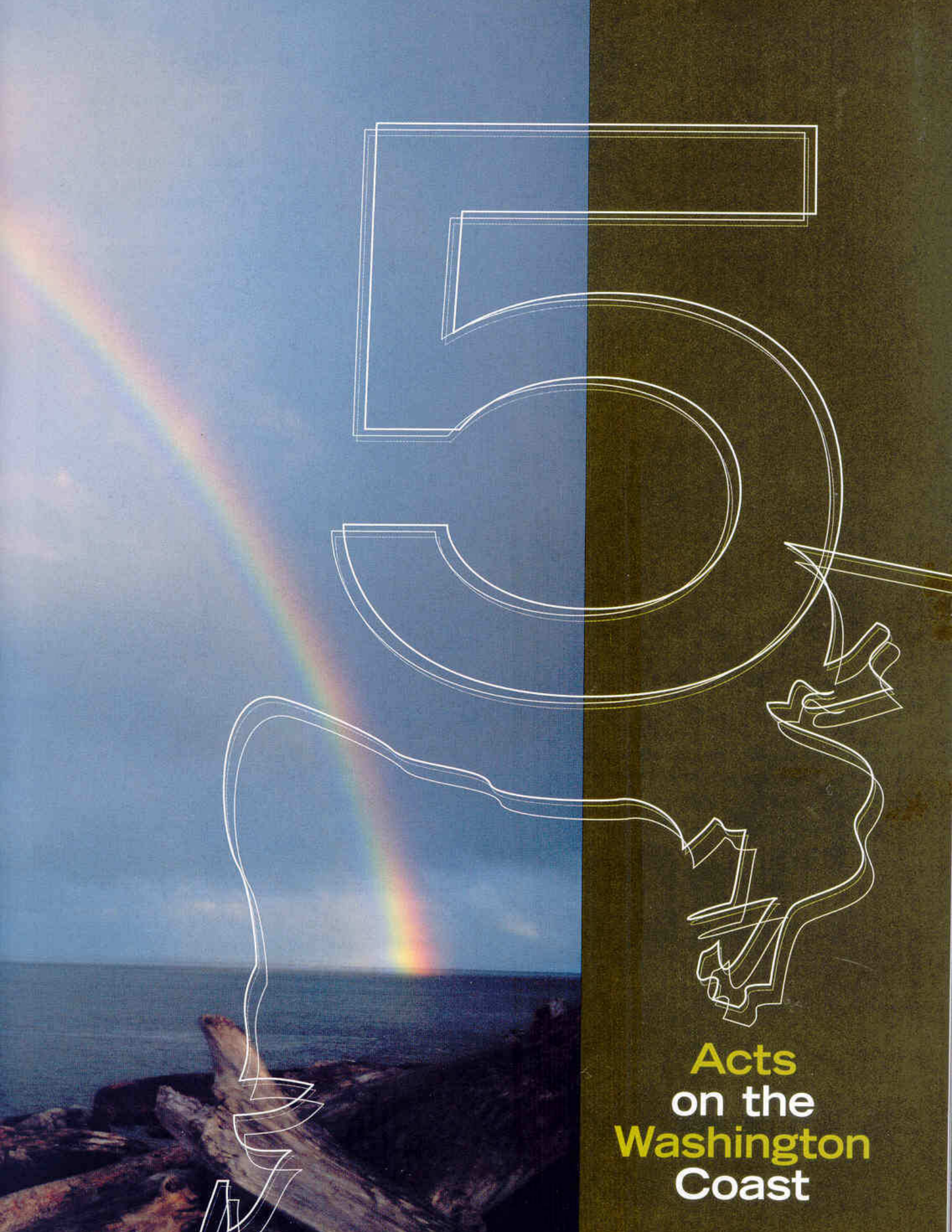
OCTOBER 2006

Find Yourself

EXPLORING THE SPLENDOR OF THE

Washington Coast





Acts
on the
Washington
Coast

Two summers ago, *Spirit* drove up and down California's Big Sur (several times) to see what all the fuss was about. Then, last summer, we upped the ante by driving the entire coast of Oregon in five days, reporting that this was also a highly recommendable road trip.

But something was still tugging at us. We needed closure.

So here it is. The final chapter in our three-years-in-the-making West Coast Trilogy. Ladies and gentlemen, let's have a nice, warm, espresso-sipping, oyster-shucking, ferry-hopping, evergreen-admiring welcome for the Washington Coast. That's right, the whole darn thing.



ACT 1

SHOOTING THE BREEZE IN LONG BEACH

Until arriving on Washington's Long Beach Peninsula, a breezy thread of land flitting above the Oregon border between the Pacific Ocean, the mouth of the Columbia River, and oyster-rich Willapa Bay, I'd never talked "kite."

I never knew there was such a thing as an entry-level kite (weren't *all* kites entry level?). Nor was I aware that the HQ Phoenix's 4 to 13 mph wind range was tremendous even for a decent, two-line stunt kite. I didn't know a kite could be described as "fidgety" or "aggressive," "bold" or "well-



Long Beach Peninsula

mannered." Or *sweet* — as in kindhearted. Who knew that a worthy kite even merited personal pronoun status? As in, "I think you'd like the Revolution EXP. He's a really sweet guy."

But I learned all this pretty fast in the peninsula's flagship town of Long Beach, a relaxed but kite-zealous little beach town with no less than three kite stores, a World Kite Museum & Hall of Fame, and several very jazzed kite authorities all within a few blocks of each other. "If you're around over the next few days, I'll take you out to fly this guy," one kite-talking salesman offered after introducing me to one of her favorite quad-lines. "He's pretty great."

It's hard not to like Long Beach, and not just for all its generous kite talk, which is in full force during the area's annual Washington State International Kite Festival (next year's is August 20-26) — a very big deal in Washington's semi-remote southwestern corner. Folks from Seattle, Portland, or anywhere in between may already know about this languorous, 28-mile spit of sand with its oyster-shell driveways, sequestered state parks, saltwater-taffy shops, and waist-high seagrass occupying some of the most easy-going, out-of-the-way pedestrian beachfront on the Pacific Coast. But if you've never talked kite, this place may have swooped under your radar until now.



CHECK IT OFF: The bottom tip of the Long Beach Peninsula is Cape Disappointment State Park, home of the recently redone Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center and a photogenic pair of cliffside, 19th-century lighthouses overlooking one of the most dramatic spots on the Pacific Coast, the confluence of the mighty Columbia River and the Pacific Ocean (aka "The Graveyard of the Pacific"). Among the million or so stellar vistas of wave-bashed cliffs and log-strewn beaches down here, our favorite involves a quick, half-mile hike up to the 200-foot summit of McKenzie Head (a tree-covered headland tucked away in a camping area, smack between the area's two lighthouses). It's the very same hill Captain William Clark and his men ascended on the afternoon of November 18, 1805, shortly after reaching the Pacific — to admire, as they put it, the "handsome view."

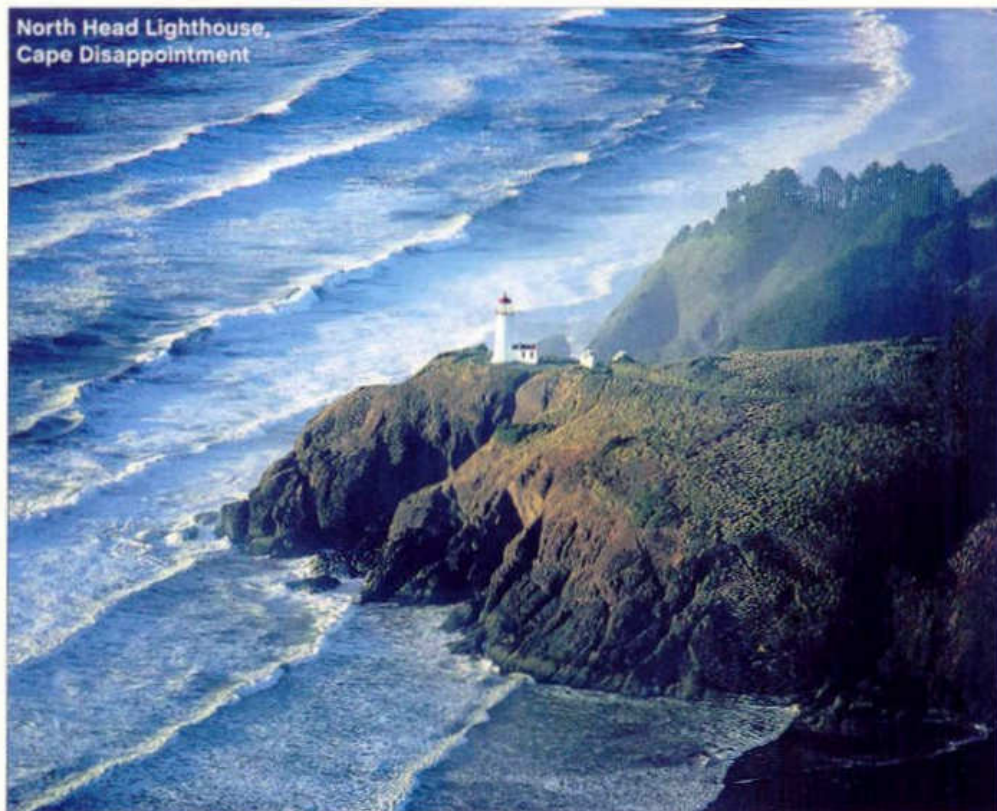


CHECK IT OUT: Hibernating in the peninsula's somnolent north end, about 15 miles above Long Beach, is Oysterville, a place anyone would want to visit for the T-shirt possibilities alone. Back in the Gold Rush days, this bayside settlement was a bivalve boomtown, reaping huge oyster profits out of Willapa Bay until (surprise) they ran out of goods. Today, the bay has been replenished and the oyster scows are back in business, hauling their harvest elsewhere. Oysterville is but a memory, which is precisely why its neat row of registered historic homes, empty church (grab a walking tour map inside), 16 full-time residents, and token shellfish shop at the end of the road (Oysterville Sea Farms) are all as oddly alluring as the name Oysterville suggests.

CHECK IN: If those beach motels and RV parks lining the lower peninsula's main drag depress you, look west and hide inside the Inn at Discovery Coast. Long Beach's newest property is that vital breath of oceanside, Pottery Barn-ish comfort that this area needs (OK, according to our gentrified tastes). It has the cozy California king-size bed, fireplace, flat-screen TV, Aveda products, Zen color scheme, two-person jetted tub overlooking the waves, and a breakfast basket unobtrusively left by your door in the morning. Now (be honest), doesn't that feel better?

CHECK, PLEASE: There are various theories about why little Long Beach is such a surprisingly great place to eat not just waffle cones but a James Beard-caliber meal. Most of them, it turns out, are tied in some way to The Shoalwater, a 25-year-old yardstick for haute Pacific Northwest cuisine set in the area's most soulful dining room (inside the historic Shelburne Inn). The menu changes regularly, but year-round staples include a 400-plus wine list, Dungeness crab cheesecake, the restaurant's signature clam and mussel chowder (with potatoes, tomatoes, cream, basil, and a hint of curry), steamed Willapa Bay Manila clams, and a secret-weapon dessert called Chocolate-Kahlua Silk Pie.

North Head Lighthouse,
Cape Disappointment



ACT 2

RAMBLING ON THE OLYMPIC PENINSULA

Even on a map, the Olympic Peninsula, Washington's immense upper-left corner circumscribed by Highway 101 and shaded almost entirely by some of the most varied wilderness on earth, may make you feel slightly uneasy — like you've suddenly shrunk. Drive its weather-scraped, giant conifer corridors and that feeling intensifies a hundredfold, as if you've arrived in the Lower 48's own mini-Alaska. Grasping it all by car, foot, or in-flight travel article is impossible. But that shouldn't stop you from trying.

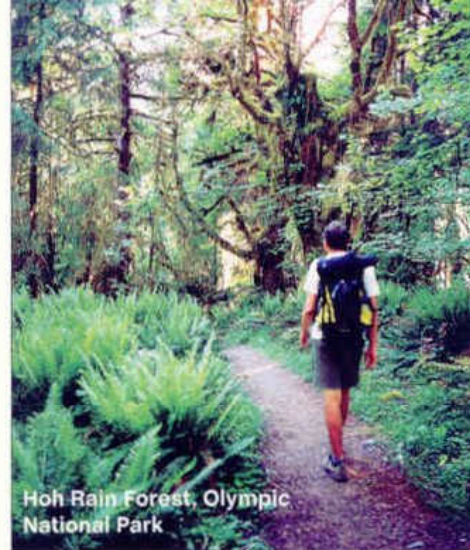
It was drizzling when I reached the turnoff for the Hoh Rain Forest, which alongside its neighboring valleys lining the west side of Olympic National Park is commonly called the wettest spot in the continental United States. About 12 feet (feet!) of rain falls here annually, with a brief reprieve

Check-in comes with a beach tidal chart and a key for one of the lodge's 44 semi-rustic log cabins, furnished with wood-burning stoves and/or kitchenettes, fresh kindling, complimentary walking sticks, and no TVs or telephones.

CHECK IT OFF: Every park worth its mountain range needs a famous, white-knuckle road chock-full of life-affirming views. Virginia's Shenandoah National Park has its Skyline Drive. Montana's Glacier National Park has Going-to-the-Sun Road. New Hampshire has Mount Washington Auto Road. And Washington's Olympic National Park has Hurricane Ridge Road — a winding, easy-grade, 17-mile drive from sea level in Port Angeles to a 5,200-foot-elevation wonderland of flowering meadows and snowy peaks that Maria von Trapp would have adored. Want to keep driving? Just before the summit visitor center, turn onto narrower, curvier, scarier Obstruction Point Road for another eight miles. Roads are open May through October and weekends (weather permitting) during the rest of the year.

CHECK IT OUT: About 40 miles west of Port Angeles on Highway 101, you'll notice a cutoff into the woods labeled "Sol Duc Hot Springs Resort." Turn here. The star attraction at the end of this 12-mile road into Olympic National Park is a series of hot mineral pools shrouded by pine-studded peaks. Resort guests have been basking in them for nearly a century (some of whom you'd swear are still here, procrastinating their return to civilization). Non-guests can purchase a \$10.75 all-day wristband and blend right in. Pools are open from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., early March to late October.

in the summer when the fog takes over. An 18-mile road leads past moss-draped alders, dripping cedars, a 270-foot-tall Sitka spruce, and a soaked sign beside the Hard Rain Café ("When you see rain, think of us") into Hoh, the country's only temperate rain forest. Driving in on an early weekday morning in April, the drizzle seemed to pick up a notch with every mile. When I reached the parking lot — empty except for a ranger's pickup — it wasn't drizzling anymore. It was raining.



Hoh Rain Forest, Olympic National Park



CHECK IN: If it's raining when you're driving along the West End of the Olympic Peninsula (and it will be), the sky-blue-trimmed Kalaloch Lodge looks that much sunnier. Perched above a vast beach piled with wave-tossed logs on one of the more enchantingly torrential edges of the world (named one of the "10 Best Places to Storm Watch" by *Seattle Magazine*), the historic property is the only oceanside, year-round lodge in Olympic National Park and pretty much the only *anything* for miles. Check-in comes with a beach tidal chart and a key for one of the lodge's 44 semi-rustic log cabins, furnished with wood-burning stoves and/or kitchenettes, fresh kindling, complimentary walking sticks, and no TVs or telephones. Practical touches like plastic soap dispensers and a framed notice on the wall that Beach Logs Can Kill remind you that you're in a national park and Aveda products aren't important right now.

CHECK, PLEASE: Unsurprisingly, the Olympic peninsula is light on noteworthy food options — something to do with that massive national park encompassing most of it. About an hour from Sol Duc Hot Springs and just down the road from Hurricane Ridge in Port Angeles, Chestnut Cottage is a local breakfast and lunch favorite (open 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.) and your best smoked salmon omelet/blueberry buckwheat pancakes option en route to the Port Townsend ferry (another hour away). If those ferry schedules don't permit sitting down, a steaming, fresh apricot walnut scone with raspberry jam on a piece of warm tin foil on your lap in the car will put any McMuffin to shame. They're known for their baked goods here.

"We don't call this rain," the ranger clarified in the parking lot, streams of water pouring down his hat. "But it comes down pretty good between October and January during monsoon season."

The big-league hike from here is along the Hoh River Trail, a nearly 20-mile tromp through lush forest, river valley, and ultimately glacier to the park's centerpiece, the Olympic mountain range. But the Hoh's two signature miler-loops, the Spruce Nature Trail and Hall of Mosses, are a sufficient natural feast, brimming with layer upon layer of ecological wizardry. Here, 1,000-year-old spruce dive skyward into clouds. Emerald big-leaf maples, covered from trunk to treetop in clubmoss, might at any moment grab lone hikers and transport them to Narnia. Rotted nurse logs lie along the path like old train wrecks, hosting new tree seedlings (one in 10,000 will make it). Microsystems within microsystems are here, growing, dying, breathing new life — everywhere. It may even make you feel slightly uneasy. And soon, very soon, you, too, will forget it's raining.

Every park worth its mountain range needs a famous, white-knuckle road chock-full of life-affirming views ... Washington's Olympic National Park has Hurricane Ridge Road — a winding, easy-grade, 17-mile drive from sea level in Port Angeles to a 5,200-foot-elevation wonderland of flowering meadows and snowy peaks.

When You Go

ACCOMMODATIONS

Beach Haven Resort, 684 Beach Haven Road, Eastsound, (360) 376-2288, mid-priced

Guest House Log Cottages, 24371 State Route 525, Greenbank, Whidbey Island, (360) 678-3115, mid-expensive

Hotel Bellwether, Bellingham, 1 Bellwether Way, Bellingham, (360) 392-3100, expensive

Inn at Discovery Coast, 421 11th St. S.W., Long Beach, (866) 843-5782, mid-priced

Kalaloch Lodge, 157151 Highway 101, Forks, (866) 525-2562, mid-priced

RESTAURANTS

Boundary Bay Brewery and Bistro, 1107 Railroad Ave., Bellingham, (360) 647-5593, inexpensive

Chestnut Cottage Restaurant, 929 E. Front St., Port Angeles, (360) 452-8344, inexpensive

Edgecliff Bar & Grill, 510 Cascade Ave., Langley, (360) 221-8899, expensive

New Leaf Café, 171 Main St., Eastsound, (360) 376-2200, mid-priced

The Shoalwater, 4415 Pacific Hwy., Seaview, (360) 642-4142, expensive

ATTRACTIONS

American Alpine Institute, 1515 12th St., Bellingham, (360) 671-1505, expensive

Cape Disappointment State Park, (360) 902-8844

Half Link Bicycle Shop, 5603 Bayview Rd., Langley, (360) 331-7980, mid-priced

Hurricane Ridge Road, Port Angeles, (360) 565-3131

Hoh Rain Forest, Olympic National Park, (800) 942-4042

Oysterville Sea Farms, Oysterville, (360) 665-6585

Sol Duc Hot Springs Resort, 12076 Sol Duc Hot Springs Road, Port Angeles, (866) 476-5382, mid-priced

The Whale Museum, 62 First St. N., Friday Harbor, San Juan Island, (360) 378-4710, inexpensive

Whidbey Island Winery and Vineyards, 5237 S. Langley Road, Langley, (360) 221-2040

World Kite Museum and Hall of Fame, 303 Sid Snyder Dr. S.W., Long Beach, (360) 642-4020, inexpensive



ACT 3

PEDALING ALONE ON WHIDBEY ISLAND

"I don't do many rentals," says David at the Half Link Bicycle Shop, handing over a bike, a helmet, and a cyclist's route map of southern Whidbey Island. The guide includes every back road labeled according to difficulty and a general note stating what "a beautiful and excellent place" Whidbey Island is for riding. David shrugs. He's not sure why this is the case.

Me neither. Whidbey Island, a sleeping giant just north of Seattle and south of the better-known San Juan Islands, seems to have everything but the long ferry lines: Remarkable places to eat and sleep; unmarked art galleries on anonymous country roads; quaint bays neighboring quainter towns; small family wineries pouring stuff you've never before tasted; a

massive rural reserve called Ebey's Landing, which will outlive the second coming of the dinosaurs. But for all of its assets, Whidbey Island is screaming for attention about as noisily as a light breeze. The locals, it seems, prefer it this way — and yet that stepsibling status with the busier San Juans just up the road probably doesn't entirely sit well with Whidbey Island either.

"Have a good ride," says David, the only guy in the only bike shop on the entire south half of the longest island (60 miles) in the contiguous United States. Note to *Jeopardy!* champs: Long Island, New York, officially calls itself a peninsula.

I roll out of Langley (quaint town), down Bayview Road (bucolic countryside with mild hills, gentle curves, and unmistakable smell of wood smoke), down Ewing Road



(colonnade of tall pines) to Maxwellton Road (dead-ends at a stony little beach overlooking bluffs and squawking seabirds). Later, the route will cut through woods along a nice off-road trail before hooking up with Langley Road and its namesake town a few miles later. In conclusion: Whidbey Island is indeed "a beautiful and excellent place" to rent a bike. Even if no one else is doing it today or tomorrow or the day after that.

CHECK IT OFF: Deception Pass State Park (north tip of Whidbey) is the island's primary stop-and-gawk spot and one of Washington's most popular state parks. Campgrounds, four miles of shoreline, and nearly 30 miles of trails are scattered across both sides of the Kodak-friendly Deception Pass Bridge, where a bottleneck of swirling water 180 feet below is Puget Sound's most graphic example of glacial handiwork (15,000 years ago) and tidal currents (today). For a quick farewell view before leaving Whidbey, park on the left just before the bridge and take the half-mile walk up Goose Rock Summit Trail to one of the island's highest points.

CHECK IT OUT: Washington, you probably knew, is one of the hot new winemaking regions. Washington is also, you may not have known, a huge rhubarb-growing state. And rhubarb, perhaps you weren't aware, makes for an interesting style of wine. Broaden your palate at the small and friendly Whidbey Island Winery and Vineyards, which emphasizes distinctive French/German whites and Washington reds and also pours some of the rhubarb stuff. Tasting hours: noon to 5 p.m. (closed Monday and Tuesday).

CHECK IN: At last count, Whidbey Island and its immediate neighbor Camano Island had one of the highest densities of B&Bs per capita in the state. They also boast some of the most exceptional and unusual ones. Case in point: Guest House Log Cottages, a cluster of six rustic-but-regal cabins hiding on 25 acres of woodlands about a mile south of the old Greenbank Store between Coupeville and Langley. The property's lush, forested grounds, home to deer, rabbits, croaking frogs, hooting owls, and a pair of resident African geese gliding across a quiet pond, is straight out of a Thornton W. Burgess book. But it's the cottages themselves, each geared as a couple's retreat, that take center stage — stuffed with equal parts creature comforts, antiques, and other barely describable details. The goliath is a two-level, custom-built, stain-glass-windowed parallel universe called The Lodge, which includes an oversize deck (overlooking the pond and those African geese), bedroom Jacuzzi (plus two more tubs), stocked kitchen, breakfast nook, living room with Howdy Doody-era TV, and buck's head on the big stone fireplace. Walk in the door, and it all makes perfect sense. You're home.

CHECK, PLEASE: Langley, in south Whidbey, is ground zero for galleries, quaint inns, wealthy retirees, and local artists living the dream. In other words, you won't find a bad meal here. But for that special-occasion atmosphere with your top-of-the-line surf 'n' turf, the aptly named Edgecliff Bar & Grill (just north of town, overlooking Saratoga Passage above Puget sound) is a no-brainer. Signature items include the local Penn Cove mussels, Kalamata-olive-encrusted rack of lamb, and any fish special.

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▶ The Washington Coast

ACT 4

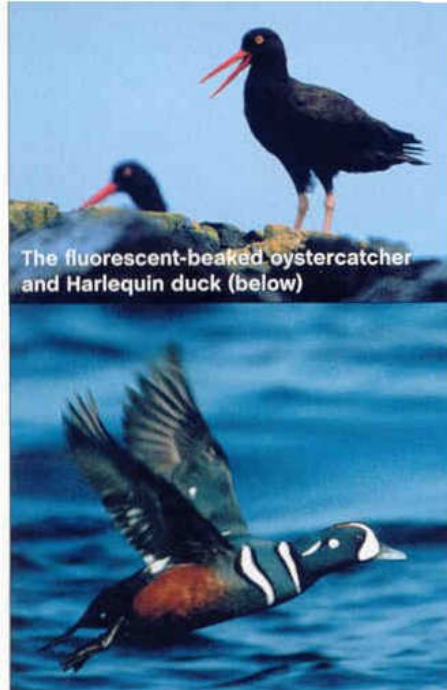
PADDLING AMONG GIANTS IN THE SAN JUANS

After we apply sunscreen and pull down our (spray) skirts, the trip begins with the usual briefings down at the docks: how to get in and out of a kayak; how to paddle properly; how to wiggle your way through the cockpit when you're upside down and underwater if you happen to tip.

"But that won't happen," says Brent, our naturalist guide with San Juan Safaris, a local kayak and whale-watching outfitter based on San Juan Island. "These boats are actually very sturdy."

Formalities over, a small group of double and triple kayaks glides out of Roche Harbor on the far (northwest) side of San Juan Island and into the saltwater tidelands of the Salish Sea. Around 90 orcas, at last count, make up the area's three local pods (J, K, and L). Over the years, these four-ton, 25-foot-long residents have let themselves be known to kayakers who are in the right place at the right time.

Paddling in this archipelago is its own divine event, plunked in a sheltered, saltwater wilderness with pin-up Pacific Northwest islands in every direction. That said, this is the point where I would've described my first friendly close encounter with a 6-foot-high killer whale dorsal fin while seated in a kayak — had it happened,

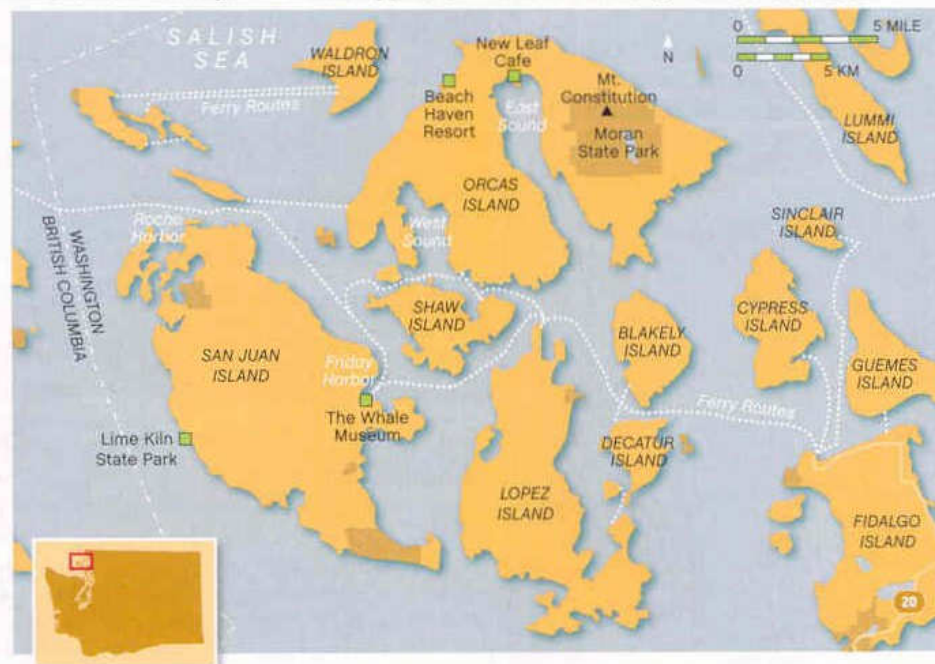


The fluorescent-beaked oystercatcher and Harlequin duck (below)

which it generally doesn't in the spring. In the summer, however ...

"We have about a 20 to 30 percent success rate of seeing orcas during the warmer months, usually on our five-hour trips down around the west coast of the island where they tend to hang out a lot," says Brent, who then throws us a vicarious bone by describing what it's like to come face-to-face with an orca in a kayak. "Unbelievable."

An otter's head pokes up, and then back down again. A fluorescent-beaked oystercatcher and dashing Harlequin duck make themselves known. Those are our big viewings for the day, and they're good enough, except that none of us wants to wiggle out of our cockpits just yet. Or ever, really. Brent points out the nearby Olympic mountain range and a beautiful patch of land just north of us, Salt Spring, in Canada's Gulf Islands. I consider making a run for the border.



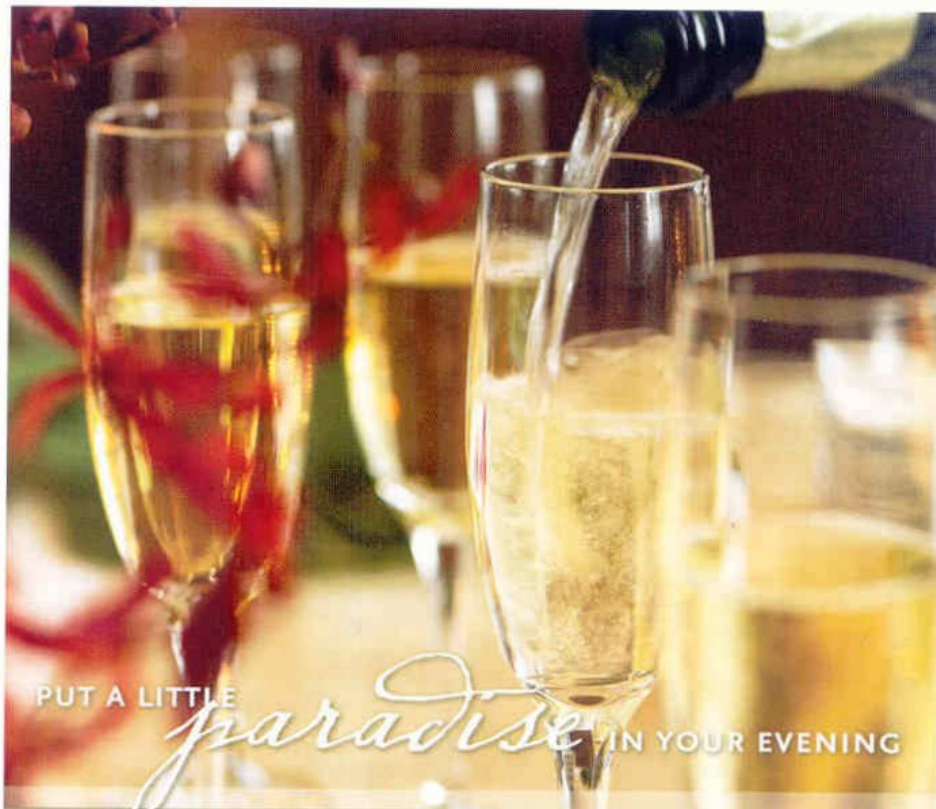


CHECK IT OFF: Lime Kiln Point State Park on the west coast of San Juan Island (aka "The Orca Highway") overlooks one of the most active marine mammal sites in the San Juans — and you can check another lighthouse off the list here. You're guaranteed a killer whale sighting (of sorts) at Friday Harbor's Whale Museum, which includes a full orca skeleton, your first up-close encounter with gray whale baleen, J, K, and L pod genealogy charts, and an enlightening comparative exhibit of human, dolphin, and gray whale brains.

CHECK IN: It takes a certain place to instill a feeling of pure escape on an island where you're already deep in that zone. The rustic log cabins at Beach Haven Resort — hugging a private pebbly shoreline and slope of old growth forest on the remote northwest corner of Orcas — are exactly the sort you'd have built with your own hands a century ago. There's a private nature trail out back and canoes and rowboats for rent out front. An ax is stored nearby for chopping more wood. Regulars have been coming back to this 60-year-old hive of inactivity for generations during the summer when the minimum stay is one week. Newcomers can get onto "the list" during the off-season, which has its own considerable charms.

CHECK IT OUT: More than 170 named islands and hundreds of non-named islands — more if you're counting at low tide — make up the San Juan archipelago. For now, here's a brief, subjective word about the three biggies, all accessible by the Washington State Auto Ferry system and hampered only by crazy, long car lines on summer weekends. San Juan Island, the hub of this chain, is your best bet for shopping and whale watching. Lopez Island, the quietest and flattest, is a magnet for cycling. Orcas Island, the "Gem of the San Juans," is for wishing you could afford property here — and for driving slowly and aimlessly with the windows down on hilly, empty, sun-dappled back roads; then driving on, up into Moran State Park and to the top of 2,409-foot Mount Constitution for views of Mount Rainier, British Columbia, and everything in between on a clear day; and back down again past pottery shacks, sculpture gardens, and eventually onto Main Street in Eastsound. Rinse and repeat. It's hard to miss anywhere in the San Juans — just don't skip that drive.

CHECK, PLEASE: In Eastsound, the Outlook Inn did time as a boarding house, bordello, and jail before becoming the community's best-known digs for the last 40 years. Several restaurants have done time in this historic building, too. The latest, New Leaf Café, may be the best yet — a faintly hip dining room and patio overlooking East Sound complete with a smooth, jazzy soundtrack and premium sake list. The relaxed Northwest menu changes seasonally, but the signature three-cheese fondue with chicken apple sausage, roasted vegetables, and artisan breads (\$18 for two at last visit) should be there. So will, let's hope, a soulful bowl of Moroccan lamb stew that this writer wasn't man enough to finish, even though restaurant portions here are labeled as "mid-sized."



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ACT 5

OVERCOMING ACROPHOBIA NEAR BELLINGHAM



"I used to be afraid of heights, too," Mark confides as we pull into the empty lot at the summit of Mount Erie, a scenic and vertiginous spot perched half an hour south of Bellingham above Anacortes and



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the Juan de Fuca Strait. "When I was 13 and rappelled for the first time, I cried the whole way down."

Mark is now a 28-year-old guide with the Bellingham-based American Alpine Institute (AAI), one of the most respected climbing schools and guide services in the country. He's guided ascents of Mount Denali and Aconcagua and some very remote-sounding peaks in China. Today, he's seated around a mess of rock-climbing gear near what he calls "practice cliffs" (but what I'm more inclined to call dizzying precipices). Mark's teaching me about ropes and belays, harnesses and helmets, chocks and cams, and whatever else you need to stay in one piece in the vertical world. Mark has clearly overcome his fear of heights. I, on the other hand, have not.

It's always been a thing for me, and not just on exposed cliff ledges. Today, I'm going rock climbing to face that fear head on and, I hope, not lose my head in the process. So far, it's not going well. Mark's telling me a lot of important things, and I'm having trouble hearing any of them. I keep looking down.

Then, all too soon, the ledge lesson is over and it's initiation time — my first rappel. The sun's shining. The thinnest wisp of cloud skims over our helmets. Green tips of the mountain's tallest pine trees are at our toes. A golden eagle and three bald ones soar below us. Way below us. "I think this will be healthy for you," Mark says.

The AAI leads trips all over the world. The Alps, Andes, and Himalayas. Many of their most popular programs, though, are right here in their North Washington back yard, including a six-day Alpine mountaineering course in the Cascades with a day of rock-climbing instruction in this lovely spot where my knees are wobbling.

Rock climbing is almost all mental, Mark needlessly tells me. It's about faith and trust. In your equipment. In your climbing partner. In yourself.

I have faith in the equipment and certainly in Mark. It's just that other dude I'm pretty leery about. My mind briefly flashes to my wife and my 4-year-old son. Then I start rappelling. Slowly. Fearfully. But less and less so when I notice that it works — and that I'm not even crying. Really, I'm not.

I do it a couple of more times, gaining confidence on sheer rock walls surprisingly fast, until Mark tells me its time to get off the bunny slope and start doing some real climbing on the "practice cliffs." Back come the butterflies.

JOHN CHRISTIAN

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The Washington Coast

We climb. We climb a 5.6 and a 5.7 — and if you don't know what that means, well, I'm not going to wreck the surprise. It's waiting out there for you, high above the golden eagles and just below Bellingham. It will probably change you. I know it changed me. I'm writing this at home from the top of a very tall ladder.

CHECK IT OFF: Never mind its unbeatable back yard (the San Juan Islands, Mount Baker, North Cascades National Park), Bellingham proper is a far nicer place to be than its paper-mill past might imply. And, yes, they have current stats to back that up ("Top Adventure Town," *National Geographic*; "Dream Town USA," *Outside Magazine*; "Boomer haven," AARP; "Cleanest air in the nation for five consecutive years," American Lung Association). May we also mention that the largest collection of antique radios in the country is right here in downtown Bellingham at the American Museum of Radio and Electricity (Wednesday through Saturday 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.)? Enough said.

CHECK IT OUT: Canada — 20 miles away. Alaska — Marine Highway ferries depart from the terminal in Bellingham's historic district, Fairhaven. Chuckanut Drive — the best alternative to Interstate 5 north of Big Sur.

CHECK IN: There are three things you need to know about the Hotel Bellwether — a mirage-like, 66-room, European-style, luxury Bellingham Bay property tucked on the edge of town in Squalicum Harbor. 1) It exists. 2) Guests with yachts can park at a private 220-foot dock. 3) The hotel's highest point (literally) is inside its Exclusive Lighthouse Suite, a three-level, self-contained, spiral-staired structure with two fireplaces, an Ultra-masseur jetted bathtub in the second-floor bedroom, and lovely views from the third-floor, 360-degree observation deck. All yours in the summer for a totally doable \$800/night — or about half that in the off-season.

CHECK, PLEASE: Boundary Bay Brewery and Bistro's reputation precedes itself ... especially if you're a microbrew fan, nostalgic Western Washington University grad, or just someone who needs to own one of those "Save the Ales" T-shirts. In its 10 years, the brewery in this converted transit company warehouse has won some of the most prestigious awards in the craft beer world. Learn why by ordering their six-house ale sampler with your home-smoked salmon chowder, yam-alechiladas, halibut tostada, Thai wrap, or lamb burger — none of which is to be confused with "pub grub." Save room for an oatmeal stout with dessert. ☺

Jordan Rane's last road trip for *Spirit* was on Florida's northeast coast. He's now waiting for Southwest to fly to Alaska.

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