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Washington's
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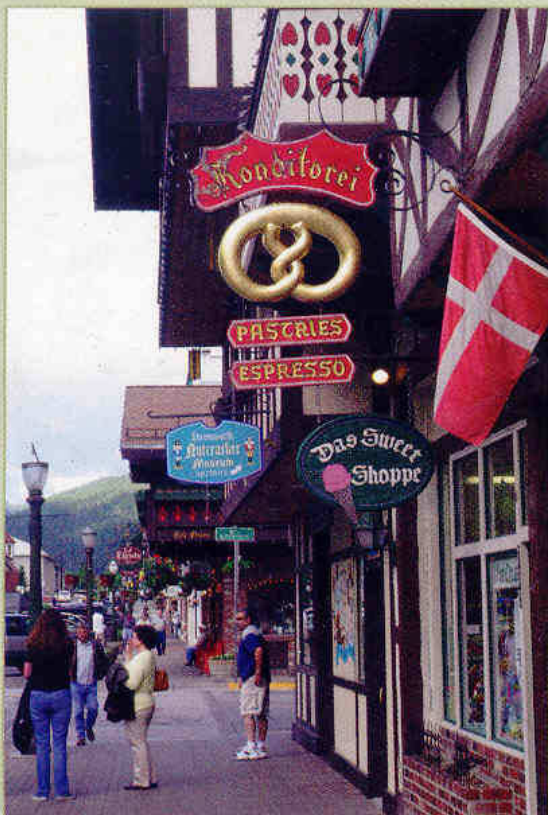


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Scenic SENSATIONS

Waterfalls, wineries and Wiener schnitzel
along Washington's Cascade Loop

TEXT BY MAXYE HENRY / PHOTOS BY LOU HENRY

COMBINING A SCENIC WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE ON THE NORTH AND MORE CITIFIED amenities on the south, the Cascade Loop Scenic Highway encircles the Cascade Range in the heart of Washington state. The self-guided tour is a mere 440 miles or so, but it's worth a leisurely trip of a few days with many stops for overnight camping, hiking, boating, sight-seeing and indulging in fine dining and wine-tasting.

The route can be traveled in either direction; we chose to begin in Bellingham, north of Seattle, and drove south to State Route 20. We then headed east through North Cascades



Leavenworth's shops and eateries entice with German pretzels and pastries. One of many scenic waterfalls on the shores of Lake Chelan (previous page). At the La Conner Brewing Co., fine ale and wood-oven pizzas are served. Lucky anglers catch bass and trout. Scenic vistas abound from the area's waterways. RV spots are close to the shoreline at Silverline Resort on Pearygin Lake. Hanging flower baskets grace La Conner's First Street.

National Park on the north side of the mountains, returning through the cities of Chelan, Leavenworth and Snohomish, and reaching Puget Sound on the West Coast via Whidbey Island, La Conner and Anacortes.

North Cascades National Park contains more than half of the total number of glaciers found outside Alaska—ideal for hikers and backcountry adventurers. Rugged, remote and pristine, the park's half-million acres are divided into three sections: Ross Lake National Recreation Area splits the northern and southern units, and Lake Chelan National Recreation Area adjoins the southern end. Rainforest dominates the western portion, with lushly forested jagged peaks, deep valleys and

cascading waterfalls meeting the high-desert terrain of the Columbia River Plateau on the east.

The national park is not only home to an astounding diversity of plants and animals, but for more than 8,000 years it was the home of Native Americans and a trading route between the Plateau tribes to the east and the Coast Salish tribes to the west. In the 19th century, settlers came to establish homesteads in places such as the Stehekin Valley and to mine for gold and other minerals and trap animals such as beaver, otter and marten for the fur trade.

Several public campgrounds can be accessed off Route 20, but there are few towns, so plan ahead for gas and provisions; Newhalem is a good spot to



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SCENIC SENSATIONS

continued

stock up. Route 20 between Mazama and Newhalem is closed during the winter due to snow, avalanches and rockslides, but it's accessible the rest of the year. Washington Pass is at 5,000-foot elevation, with great views from the trail near the visitor center.

Newhalem, a company town owned and managed by Seattle City Light power company as part of its Skagit Hydroelectric Project, is still home to 70 workers and their families. Historic homes and buildings look much like they did when the town bustled with workers and curious visitors during the 1930s. Walk over the suspension bridge to see Ladder Creek Falls and the native-plant garden behind the art-deco powerhouse. The Diablo Lake Adventure Tour is a one-hour round trip aboard the *Alice Ross III* that chugs up the lake to the base of Ross Dam and back again.

At the eastern end of the loop lies the frontier town of Winthrop, with wooden sidewalks and false-fronted buildings — including several built during the mining boom at the end of the 19th century. Eateries, a brew pub, shops and the Shafer Museum entertain visitors. Three-Fingered Jack's Saloon is the oldest legal saloon in the state.

Silverline Resort on Pearygin Lake is a well-appointed, pet-friendly RV park with sites on the shore as well as a boat launch and a fishing dock. Paddle boats can be rented, and you can play miniature golf, bocce ball and horseshoes. Nearby, Pearygin Lake State Park has a beach swimming area, a boat launch and a dock, plus campsites, picnic tables, a bathhouse, horseshoe pits and a volleyball court. Campfire programs are conducted every Tuesday and Thursday night from June 15 through Labor Day, and the park offers a Junior Ranger program for children. The lake permits fishing, swimming, water-skiing and personal watercraft. Anglers fish for bass and trout in the spring-fed lake, and bird-watching and wildlife viewing are popular in the area. In spring and summer, colorful wildflowers share the scene with red-winged and yellow-headed blackbirds.

Swinging to the south and heading westward on State Route 153 and U.S. 97, Chelan and Lake Chelan are well worth a pause. Chelan is home to Tsil-lan Cellars and five other wineries, all featuring welcoming tasting rooms. Three *Lady of the Lake* cruise boats take passengers 55 miles through one of the deepest gorges in North America to the northern end of the lake and the isolated town of Stehekin, stopping to drop off hikers and campers at a couple of small settlements along the way.

Rainbow Falls can be reached by taking a 3½-mile bus tour from the Stehekin dock. Other bus and bicycle tours are also popular. We met hikers who planned to stay overnight at the Stehekin Lodge and return the next day after taking one of the many day hikes in the area. The two- to four-hour boat ride (depending on the time of year and which vessel you're on) is the only way back to Chelan unless you opt to save time by hopping on a floatplane for the return trip, as we did. Views of the waterfalls we had seen from the boat were equally stunning from the air.

Back in the RV on U.S. 97, we turned off at Cashmere to visit Liberty Orchards Candy Kitchen for a tour and samples of their famous Aplets and Cotlets, fruit-and-nut confections based on a traditional family recipe for Turkish delight. We shopped for bargains in the factory store and then headed west again on U.S. 2.

The idea of a Bavarian-themed alpine village in Washington State may seem a trifle schmaltzy, but Leavenworth pulled itself out of economic doldrums by revamping the old lumber town's image in the 1960s. Today, hanging flower baskets garnish gingerbread facades on buildings, and restaurants serve sauerbraten, Wiener schnitzel and beer. Bakeries with Viennese pastries are temptingly displayed in the windows, and there's even a museum with 2,000 nutcrackers. Surrounding mountain views and clear air make it a picturesque place to stroll on a sunny day, and scenic vistas turn truly magical under a frosting of winter snow. The Wenatchee River flows through the town, providing a pleasant waterway for canoeing, kayaking and bird-watching float trips. Out of town, the Wenatchee, Methow and

Tieton rivers get feisty enough for whitewater rafting.

As we left Leavenworth, we were ready for a change of pace, so we stopped for lunch at the 59er Diner for burgers named after recording stars, and indulged in malts, music and memorabilia from the 1950s.

Deception Falls near Skykomish is just one of many waterfalls on the south side of the loop. The short interpretive trail is easily accessible and offers a great view of cascading water and clear pools.

Snohomish earns its title as the "Antique Capital of the Northwest," with more than 450 antique dealers, restaurants and shops concentrated in a six-block section of the old town. It's pedestrian-friendly, with lots of benches and cafés for browsers to stop and enjoy a short break from shopping.

In Everett, we took The Boeing Company factory tour. Visitors enter the largest building in the world by volume: 472 million cubic feet. The complex is home to the 747, the 767, the 777 and soon the brand-new 787/7E7 Dreamliner, which will reportedly be ready to carry 200 to 300 passengers per trip by 2008.

On the flight line, we saw aircraft in various stages of flight-testing, and got a look at how the company configures planes for airlines and governments around the world. The new \$21.7-million Future of Flight Aviation Center, which opened in December 2005, houses the Boeing Tour Center, a gift shop, a restaurant, a conference center, interpretive displays and aerospace exhibits provided by the Museum of Flight.

To complete our Cascade Loop, we took the ferry from Mukilteo to Whidbey Island. We detoured to the town of Langley — where the Edgecliff Restaurant serves elegant meals — before driving north on state highways 525 and 20 to take the Deception Pass Bridge back to the mainland. Rhododendrons, lilacs and other spring flowers bloomed everywhere we looked.

La Conner is another extremely charming waterfront town, home to many artists and retirees. Restaurants, a brew pub and galleries line the main streets. La Conner is also home to three museums: the Museum of Northwest Art, Skagit County Historical Museum

and La Conner Quilt Museum.

Our final stop was in Anacortes, where we took a whale-watching cruise through the San Juan Islands. Puget Sound is home to nearly 100 orcas in three different pods, and California gray whales visit in the spring and summer. Orcas of all ages and sizes were clearly visible from the boat, along with gray whales, porpoises, sea lions and a variety of birds, including bald eagles.

Waterfalls, wildlife and welcoming towns — what more could a traveler

ask for? Plan to explore Washington's Cascade Loop yourself, either following the route we took or taking the southern leg first and returning westward through the national park. **11**

i The Cascade Loop Association, (509) 662-3888, cascadeloop.com

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