

Wandering The Great Northwest

Wandering or maybe better stated, taking a different turn this month.

I was fortunate enough to take a trip to the great northwest this past month. What an awesome opportunity. I am so blessed to be able to visit so many great places. Where to begin?

My wife Nettie and I headed northwest to the great state of Washington. We flew into SeaTac Airport (we never did visit Seattle), didn't have time) and promptly headed to [Mt. Rainier National Park](#). What an awesome place! Yes, there is still snow and a lot of it. We could not get through the entire park because roads were still



closed in mid-May. That is okay, we saw what we wanted to see, for the most part. You could not see the summit of Rainier. Apparently, it is rare to see the summit. The mountain is so tall that it creates its own weather and there are very few days where you can see the summit. Bummer! The rhododendrons were absolutely gorgeous. This is the state flower and there were so many colors and types of this plant. Be prepared for traveling in the west. If you are driving, find an economy car. Gas prices are close to \$1.00 higher per gallon than in good ole Indiana. Waterfalls, beautiful wooded areas, rural areas, wildlife, and the like are abundant in all the parks that we visited. Surprise, everything west of Mt. Rainier to the Pacific Coast and up through Alaska is a rainforest. The second largest in the world!



Next was [Mt. St. Helen's](#). Unfortunately, we could not once again see the summit or what is left of it because of weather. Mid-May again is a tough time to take a trip in mountainous areas. A lot of the roads are closed which means those portions of the park are closed as well. All that means is that we have a good reason to visit again. Cannot wait to see how this huge event that occurred 39 years ago is explained, how the environment has reclaimed its once vibrant, then decimated and now vibrant landscape again. Many scientific studies have been generated due to this natural occurrence that has changed a lot of thinking regarding creation of canyons, carbon dating, etc. Put this on the list of places to visit!

Off to [Astoria](#), Oregon and the place where The Goonies was filmed. Does anyone remember that movie! It's amazing coastline and all its crags and crannies and rocky formations. We actually visited Astoria for the National Historic Site commemorated for Lewis and Clark and the end of their venture to the Pacific coast. Fort Clatsop is the recreated fort and historic site regarding their time in the region while completing their trip across the wilderness. Does anyone remember their history lessons and that they had Sacagawea with them? You can read about her as well as the rest of the group that traveled with Lewis and Clark. While in Astoria, I suggest you climb the Column. It is a tower you climb and has awesome views of the Pacific, Columbia River (boundary between Oregon and Washington) and the City itself. It is quite the workout climbing those 164 steps. The Column is covered by many historic murals depicting history of the area and of Oregon.



[Olympic National Park](#) was the next destination and wow! Besides staying one night in Forks (we did not see any vampires or werewolves for you Twilight Fans and we did not see Sasquatch either), we were able to see a great majority of the park. It seems every time you took one of the many entrances into the park you saw something new and different. First, we visited Quinalt, a small little town on the south side of the park where the world's largest spruce tree can be found. There is also another cool waterfall and photo op further east of the tree that you should take a gander at. You must take in the portion of the park along the Pacific Ocean and play around on the beaches. These beaches aren't like the ones we find in Florida, so don't expect sand, sun and lots of swimming fun but the site is pretty amazing. [The Hoh Rainforest](#)

was something that I would have never expected. I would have thought I was in New Orleans with all the moss and grasses hanging from the trees, all the water and humidity but the large trees and mountains in the background told me that we were somewhere else and somewhere special. Take the Hall of Mosses Trail and just take it all in. Listen, smell, see and feel all that is around you. Awesome stuff!

Everyone always asks what the coolest site was you saw. Well they are all cool, but [Neah Bay](#) and [Cape Flattery](#) were pretty darn cool to visit. Prior to visiting we had breakfast and sat down to eat looking out onto one of the bays in the area watching the seals, sea otters and eagles. What a great way to observe God's great nature and eat breakfast. Again, one of the events that you just must experience. You couldn't have asked for a better start to the day. Cape Flattery is as far Northwest in Washington and the lower 48 that you can travel to. The pictures of the landscape don't even come close to doing it justice. It is amazing looking out over the [Strait of Juan de Fuca](#) and the Pacific Ocean, seeing [Tatoosh Island](#) and its lighthouse, seeing the gorgeous colors of the different water views, more crags and crannies and all the caves created by the waves of water. They say you can feel the earth move when the waves are high enough and the waves crash into the caves.

We covered a lot of territory in a short period of time, basically three days and 700+ miles. It is amazing what you can see and what you can do when you put your mind to it. It was nice that we were able to hook up with a good college friend from good ole Indiana. Thank you, John Burrell, for giving us a good tour!



We really headed out west to visit Alaska. All I can say is that you must put this on your bucket list! It was a great place to visit and venture. Take the time to do it right though. You cannot just go without plans and only expect to spend a few days there. One thing we found out is that Alaska is 1/5 the size of the lower 48. It is rural, it is much more expensive in a lot of the places we visited and most everyone owns a boat or plane and that is how they mostly get around. The train is also used a lot as well. They do have cars, but their mode of transportation seems to much different than what Midwesterners are used to.

I don't even know where to start when discussing Alaska, so rather than write a huge dissertation, which this will end up being that way anyway, I will just point out a few things. We flew from SeaTac to Anchorage. We drove from Anchorage to Seward one day and visited [Kenai Fjords National Park](#) and saw Exit Glacier. On the way back to Anchorage we visited Girdwood, took a tram to the top of the mountain at [Alyeska Resort](#) and saw some awesome views. Ever heard of the [Bore Tide](#)? We got to see this relatively rare event in the Turnagain Arm. Ever seen a small tidal wave with people paddle boarding? This was a really unexpected event and was really, really cool! After spending several days in Anchorage, another false conception about Alaska and Anchorage in general, the city is 300+ thousand people and very modern and quite a place for accessibility. Many trails, many parks, many places to visit and take in and yes there are moose in the city. It was too bad we didn't see the salmon running but this again will give us another reason to head North to Alaska again and check that out along with seeing the Aurora Borealis which is hard to see when sunset in at 11:00 pm, sunrise is at 4:00 am and the sky never really gets dark.



Anchorage to [Denali](#) was a bus trip along some of the greatest wilderness you can imagine. Seeing Denali from the distance was awesome and we were part of the 30% club, only about 30% of people actually get to see the peak of Denali. Once again, this mountain is so high that it creates its own atmosphere and is typically cloudy at the peak. Wow! We got some great pictures. While in the National Park, we saw moose and caribou and Dall sheep and eagles and the biggest surprise, a porcupine. I never expected to see a porcupine. We missed out on bears though. Bummer! From Denali we traveled by train (9 hours or so but what a great trip with glass roofs and many opportunities for wildlife and

scenery viewing) to [Whittier](#). Look up Whittier. The majority of the people live in one building, work in that building, play, shop, go to school, exercise, etc. I wish we could have spent some time looking at the building and visiting but we had to board our cruise ship.

Cruising was awesome! We visited [Skagway](#), [Juneau](#) and [Ketchikan](#). We cruised through [Glacier Bay National Park](#), visited the [Klondike Gold Rush National Historic Park](#) and learned about what the gold seekers experienced and the toil and troubles they went through, walked on [Mendenhall Glacier](#) after taking helicopter ride, saw a lumber jack show (there was only one lumber jack from Alaska and two of the lumber jacks were from Indiana – Hammond and Muncie), went to Totem Bight State Park and saw multiple totem poles and learned about the culture of the three different Indian tribes within the area. We did so much that I couldn't even explain it all. We could have done so much more but just did not have time. Our last destination was getting off the cruise ship in Vancouver, British Columbia. On our bus tour to the airport we learned and saw quite a bit. The area is called the Hollywood of Canada, many movies have and are filmed there. There were many signs in Chinese because 250 thousand moved there when Hong Kong was dedicated back to China. Very diverse, very expensive to live there, very urban, and gas was \$7 - \$8 per gallon. Cost of living is apparently pretty high.



What a trip! Feel free to ask questions and I will give you my thoughts on Wandering Alaska and the northwest. Can't wait to do it again.

~ Jeff Banning