

WASHINGTON'S OFF-ROAD SCENIC ATTRACTIONS- SOUTH CENTRAL#1 Roger Urbaniak

My goal today is to virtually a drive through the South-Central portion of Washington State and to describe interesting places that I have discovered during my many enjoyable trips here. Hopefully as my reader, you will make notes and experience many of these sights with a drive of your own.

Heading east from Seattle on I-90 provides pleasant scenery from the start with glimpses of mountain foothills, and crossings of Snoqualmie river branches as you pass North Bend. Once at the summit at Snoqualmie Pass, scenery changes quickly. Keechelus Lake on the south side of I-90 is dam controlled to strategically release water captured from snow melt helping salmon migrate plus also help the farmers of the Yakima basin by providing irrigation for crops and orchards. You might note an animal overpass crossing I-90 near milepost 62. I helped gather migration data on snowshoes to pinpoint its location.

Exit 80 going north would take one to Roslyn or newly developed massive development of Suncadia. I enjoy the south side of the freeway here though as morel mushrooms are plentiful in the spring and the Yakama tribe has located a salmon fish hatchery to help them in their goal to repopulate Chinook, Coho and Sockeye salmon. Cle Elum, Exit-84, provides a short relaxing detour to grab gas and groceries.

At Ellensburg detour on Canyon Road for some of the best scenery and wildlife viewing in the state. Deer, Big Horn Sheep, and Wild Turkey are plentiful over the next 30 miles as are drift boats full of fly fishermen trying their luck on the Yakima River. This catch and release stretch of river is considered to be the best fly-fishing river in the state. Numerous fishing guides make a living offering reasonably priced fly-fishing outings. During summer, fishermen compete with the many college students rafting the river. Several rafts tied together make for a party atmosphere. On hot summer days deer wade next to shore to graze on green grasses when hillside grass has become brown and dried out.

Canyon Road eventually intersects I-82 near Selah. Good viewing is in all directions as rivers with lightly treed areas give drivers that big sky feeling talked of in Montana. Wide- open spaces allow for viewing Mount Rainier, Mount Adams and Mount Hood with just a turn of your head. From Yakima I sometimes take SR 12 west past Naches to watch WDFW feed Elk and Sheep during winter to keep animals from damaging nearby orchards. Today we head south though towards Toppenish on SR 97 and note the orchards, farms growing hops, and fruit stands that prosper here on Yakima River irrigation water. Toppenish is worth a detour as the town residents years ago began painting western murals on sides of buildings in earnest. A group named themselves Mural a Day society and annually highlight the town with their artwork. Well over 70 quality murals exist here already with more popping up each year.

Driving south on 97 is through Yakima Tribal lands. They should be admired for accomplishments the tribe has made in restoring wildlife that once existed in the area. Antelope, Bison, Wild horses, and sage grouse populations have all benefited from tribal help here. You should keep your eyes peeled for them as you continue your drive south towards Goldendale. Goldendale is known for having a free to the public observatory with free tours given by Washington State Parks as it gets dark. Normally a brief lecture is given and then the audience is escorted to an adjoining room where the telescope has been already focused on the lecture for the public to view.

Continuing south for a few miles on SR-97 brings you to a turn off where a right turn will take you to Maryhill Museum or a left turn to a full-size replica of England's Stonehenge. Both structures were built in the early 1900's by Sam Hill, a famous philanthropist and developer. Stonehenge Honors WWI local soldiers and is free to view. Maryhill Museum is affordably priced and worth the visit. As you head south from Stonehenge just before the Columbia River is Maryhill State Park plus the first stretch of pavement built in the United States-built by Sam Hill of course. Turn west before crossing the bridge, head west on a state highway to Horsethief State Park where you will find excellent pictographs and petroglyphs to view. Corps of Engineers, at the request of Native People, salvaged the quality stones from the canyon by the river and placed them on display at the park before they were flooded by the hydroelectric dams. She Who watches is an exceptional work but you need to make a reservation to view it.

Rather than retracing your drive back through the center of the state, you may wish to continue west along the Columbia river to enjoy the views in the area. Barges are able to pass the dams using locks plus an occasional tour boat can also be seen on the water. It is the fishermen trying their luck that are the most visible however, especially in early fall, when salmon migrate in large numbers. Wind surfing is popular on the river as winds through the gorge provide good propulsion. On a good weekend day well over a hundred sails can be seen frolicking back and forth on the water. Stopping at one of the dams to view a fish ladder is fun, especially when the salmon are running in good numbers. If you have some extra time find a guide that will take you out either for salmon or popular walleye.

We usually cross to the Oregon side of the Columbia near The Dalles Oregon and continue driving west but stopping to view spectacular Multnomah Falls on the way. We usually take a driving break at Dalles with over 200 miles covered so far and find that motel accommodations are good here with plenty to choose from. A choice of good restaurants is available here too. Having no sales tax in Oregon is an added perc to stop. Our style of traveling is to map out stops roughly 2-3 hours apart to keep from getting car weary and to allow us enough time to enjoy the new sights and adventures along the way.

When we reach I-5 near Portland it is time to turn north and head for home. Scenic highlights remain before we get home however if we have allowed time to enjoy them. National Parks with visitor centers are available in the forms of Mount St Hellen's and Mount Rainier with reasonably short detours off the interstate and each has scenic drives, especially in the spring or summer when the wildflowers are in bloom. Remember to take plenty of photographs on your driving trip. We have also discovered that journaling our longer road trips helps us recall the details of our enjoyment much better. I hope that you have enjoyed this virtual trip recalled from my driving experiences and decide to take it yourself soon.