

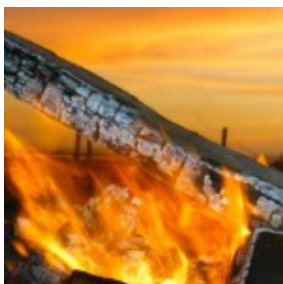
Northwest coast – a wet, green change of scenery

By Toni Sopocko

OCEAN CITY, Wash. – Even living in a beautiful place like Lake Tahoe, sometimes you've just got to get out of Dodge.

For this year's fall adventure we decided to take the land yacht (our 19-foot trailer) somewhere it had never been before – the Washington coast. We settled on shooting for the Olympic coastal town of Ocean City because it has a state park with campgrounds and we have generally had good luck with those in other states.

We were not disappointed.



Fires on the beach in Washington.
Photos/Toni Sopocko

The park was great and it was just a short stroll through the shrubbery to the beach from our site.

But I had a hankering for more so we cruised north a little to another state park at a place called Pacific Beach. I thought I had found RV paradise. The state park has a few tent sites, but it's heaven for trailers and motor homes with its

beachfront property on a river mouth. We lucked out and got a site right at the sand and were able to watch the sun set that night while sitting on the lawn right behind our trailer.

High tide brought the waves up nearly to the breakwater below the trailers and low tide had us walking out hundreds of yards to the clam beds. The dogs had a fabulous time chasing seagulls from the shore during the day while we walked the beach collecting sand dollars.

At night we built bonfires on the beach and chatted with other campers.

It's a great spot, but small, so next time we'll make reservations. As it was, the coming weekend was open season on those thousands of clams that we knew lurked in the sand so we had to vacate our site. The timing was actually fortunate because a storm was heading in and with the total exposure of the campground; I suspect it might have been an uncomfortable weekend.



Northwest ocean beaches provide plenty of space to stroll.

While in Washington we took a couple side trips into the Olympic National Park. It's a stunning place, though awfully wet. Shades of green on green like you've never seen in your life.

We drove around Lake Quinault, a lovely little lake. While there we saw the biggest Sitka spruce in the world and took a hike through a blow-down forest. They must get some incredible winds up there.

We wandered around the Hoh River – a distinct possibility for a future trip. We noted quite a bit of elk poop while there, so did some more snooping and were rewarded by watching a small herd ford the river. Several does and calves and one big buck that posed for some out-of-focus photos.

Buzzed up to the town of Forks where the “Twilight” movie was filmed to have some lunch. It’s a cute little town, seriously into its vampires. Even saw Bella the truck at the information center.

In the future I’d do a complete circle of the Olympic National Park when we can spend more time there – but not during the rainy season.

We headed south from there to Fort Stevens State Park in Oregon, just outside of Astoria. Astoria is a great little city at the mouth of the Columbia River. Lots to do. If you ever get there, you’ve got to go the Columbia River Maritime Museum. It’s a beautiful building with excellent displays of nautical history. Give it at least three hours. We spent most of a rainy day there, absolutely enthralled.

Astoria also has lots of good restaurants. One little spot we found was the Portway Pub. It’s “the oldest watering hole in the oldest American settlement west of the Rockies”. That alone was recommendation enough for me. They had great burgers and beer.



A lighthouse
with history.

Fort Stevens Park is a nice place to camp, too. We did have to hole up for a day and a half in the storm, but the campground is well protected from the elements.

When we were able to get out, we found the park has a wonderful system of bicycle and pedestrian trails that wind for miles to the beaches, river and historic fort. There are batteries and barracks and a museum with lots of good information for the history buff. Fort Stevens was in operation from the Civil War to WWII. It was even shelled by a Japanese submarine, but no damage done and no fire returned, as the sub was too far offshore.

We spent a few days exploring the beach and the fort until it was time to get back to the road to head home.

I still have the sound of the surf in my head and in my heart.