



AUTO TOUR

AAA Washington Travel Services

Northern Cascades Loop

A loop trip through the northern Cascades of Washington traverses one of North America's scenic treasures. Our recommended itinerary visits three distinct geographic regions, offering a sampler of the Evergreen State's great diversity. In the west the Puget Lowlands present a rolling mosaic of woods and farmland fronting the saltwater reaches of Washington's inland sea. The Cascade Range with its deep valleys, snow clad peaks and mantle of dense coniferous forest dominates the center. East of the mountains the forest gives way to sagebrush and grassland, a semi-arid realm where irrigated orchards fill narrow valleys.

Our **Northern Cascades Loop Auto Tour** follows a 390-mile clockwise loop starting in Everett. First heading north to Burlington, it strikes east through the heart of the North Cascades to the Methow Valley. The southbound segment parallels the Columbia River to Wenatchee, then heads west via Stevens Pass back to the Puget Lowlands.

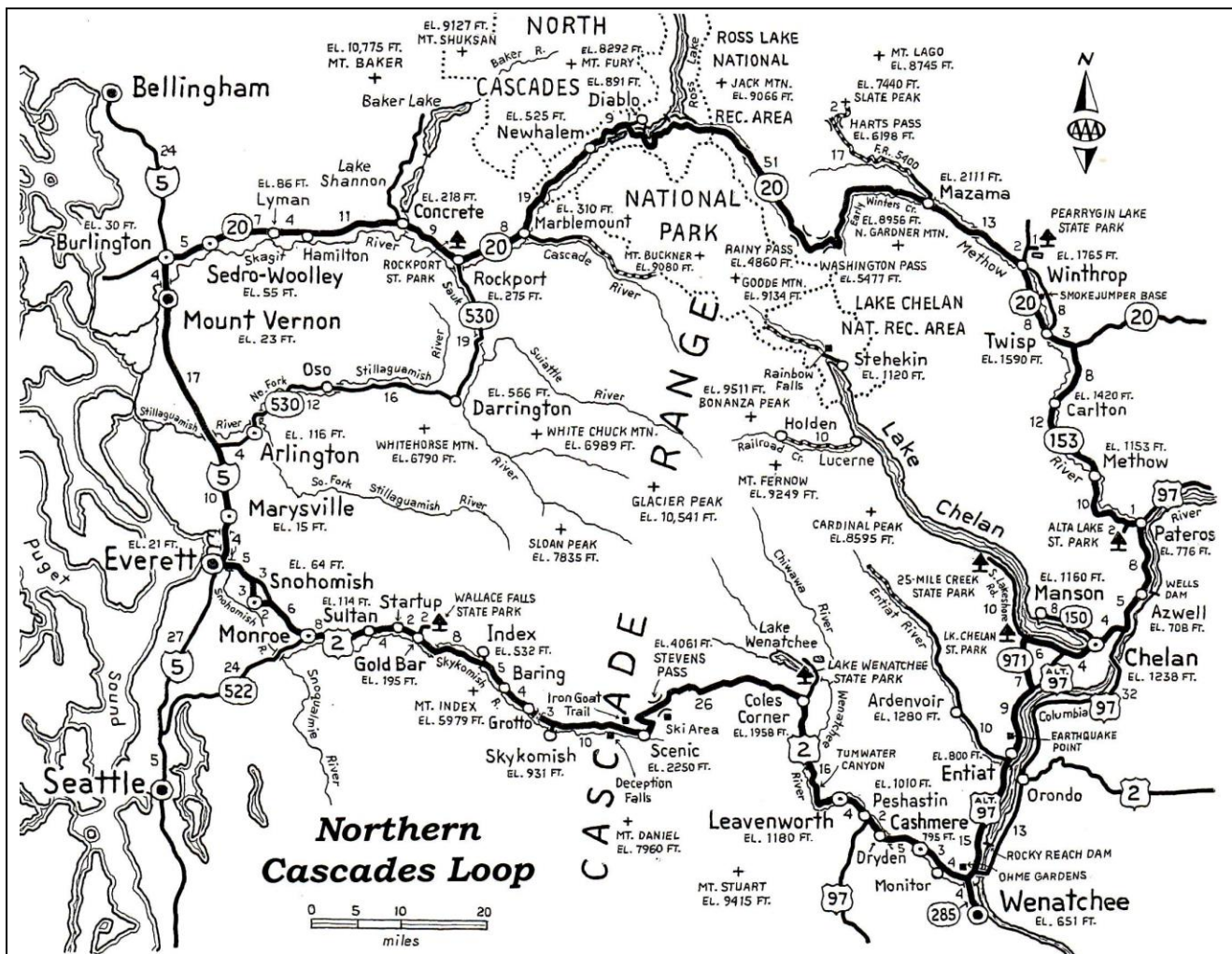


SEASONAL CLOSURE –

The section of SR-20 between Ross Lake and Mazama is closed in winter, generally from Late November or early December until late April or early May. These dates vary, depending on snow conditions.

← Highway 20 hugs the shore of Gorge Lake, smallest of a trio of reservoirs on the Skagit River in Ross Lake National Recreation Area. [Photo: National Park Service]

This 390-mile route requires approximately 8-9 hours of driving and for most travelers is too much for a single day. Given the numerous attractions en route, a trip of two or three days permits a more relaxing pace.



1. West Leg

Everett to Burlington: (Northbound via I-5 – 36 miles)

From **EVERETT** (pop. 108,300, alt. sea level to 450 ft.) follow I-5 north. Just north of Everett, the freeway crosses the Snohomish River and passes **MARYSVILLE** (pop. 64,940, alt. 15 ft.). This fast-growing city marks the northern end of the Seattle-Tacoma-Everett urban area. The large **Tulip Casino and Hotel** complex is just west of exit 200. The tribe's **Seattle Prime Outlets**, the state's largest off-price mall is west of Exit 202.

Suburban sprawl continues to Exit 208. Beyond, Interstate 5 traverses wooded country and the valleys of the Stillaguamish and Skagit rivers. Dairying and vegetable crops are raised on the fertile valley soils.

MOUNT VERNON (pop. 33,730, alt. 23 ft.), named for President George Washington's Potomac River home, sprawls along the east bank of the Skagit River. Fur traders established a trading post here in 1870. Farmers soon followed, settling on the fertile valley floodplain. In 1876 a volunteer group of townfolk undertook the daunting task of clearing a massive tangle of logs and brush that had accumulated in the river channel. This blockage made river navigation hazardous and hindered trade. In 1878 the first steambot made its way up the Skagit providing the first tenuous link with the outside world.

Mont Vernon grew slowly as a trading center for one of western Washington's most productive farming districts. It became the Skagit County seat in 1884. The area west of the river, known as the Skagit Flats, is one of North America's major producers of commercial flower bulbs. Tulips are the main crop, but daffodils and iris are also grown. The spectacle of acre after acre of colorful flowers attracts throngs of visitors, especially during the annual **Skagit Valley Tulip Festival**, held throughout the month of April.

Old canneries and warehouses line the Burlington Northern Santa Fe tracks just west of I-5. The compact business district of brick and stone buildings extends west from the freeway to the river. To access the district,

take Exit 226. One of the more interesting buildings in the downtown core is the **Lincoln Theatre** on First and Kincaid. Its auditorium houses a 1926 Wurlitzer theatre organ, a relic from the silent film era. The theatre hosts concerts and other live performances and screens classic films.

Just north of Mount Vernon, I-5 crosses the Skagit River. High levees flank the stream, protecting the lower valley from devastating winter and spring floods. From the bridge a view stretches eastward to the snowy peaks of the North Cascades. You may glimpse bald eagles perched in the cottonwoods lining the river. They frequent the area from December into February, drawn by salmon heading upstream to spawn.

East of the freeway, urbanization continues north to **BURLINGTON** (pop. 8,675, alt. 30 ft.), another prosperous trading center for the surrounding farmlands. Founded as a logging camp in the 1880s, it became an important rail junction served by both the Great Northern and Northern Pacific lines. Two shopping venues – **Cascade Mall** and **Outlet Shoppes at Burlington** – are on the south side of town, east of Interstate 5 Exit 229. In Burlington we leave the freeway at Exit 230 to join the North Cascades Highway (SR-20).

2. Across the North Cascades

Burlington to Twisp (Eastbound via WA-20 – 140 miles)

The **NORTH CASCADES HIGHWAY**, which begins at Burlington, is part of a much longer route. SR-20, known as the **North Cross-State Highway**, runs from Discovery Bay on the Olympic Peninsula to Newport on the Idaho border. Totalling 436½ miles, this is the longest numbered highway in the Evergreen State. Follow signs for eastbound SR-20 through Burlington – the road makes two 90-degree turns east of the freeway: first left, then right. In clear weather the profile of the North Cascades gleams on the eastern horizon.

Five miles east of I-5 is **SEDRO-WOOLLEY** (pop. 11,030, alt. 55 ft.), an important trading and forest products town. As we enter town, look on the right for the steam locomotive, tender, log car and caboose in **Harry Osborne Memorial Park**. The train served the Puget Sound and Baker River logging railroad and symbolizes Sedro-Woolley's history as a logging center since the late 1800s. The settlement of Sedro grew up at the head of steamboat navigation on the Skagit River. Its name is a misspelling of *cedro*, the Spanish word for cedar, in recognition of Western red cedar, the dominant forest tree of the area. The adjoining community of Woolley sprang up at the junction of three railroads. The two towns merged in 1898.

Highway 20 bypasses the central part of Sedro-Woolley on its west and north sides. Drive into the downtown area, where wide streets and low-rise buildings reflect a typical American townscape. The **Sedro-Woolley Museum**, at Murdock and Woodworth streets, has an eclectic collection of memorabilia illustrating the town's history. The National Park Service maintains a **Visitor Center** at 2105 Highway 20 on the north side of town. This is headquarters for North Cascades National Park complex, which includes Ross Lake and Lake Chelan national recreation areas.

On the northeast edge of Sedro-Woolley, Fruitdale Road leads one mile north to the former **Northern State Hospital**, a mental institution that operated from 1912-1976. The grounds feature Mission Revival-style buildings on a landscaped campus. Today it houses federal and state public service agencies.

Highway 20 continues eastward through lush dairy farming country. Four miles east of Sedro-Woolley a community known as Cokedale sprang up south of the highway when coal was discovered in the area. Once promoted as *The Pittsburgh of the West*, the mines only operated from 1892 to 1902. Continuing east, foothills covered with second- and third-growth timber close in on the valley. The quiet rural hamlets of **LYMAN** (pop. 450, alt. 86 ft.) and **HAMILTON** (pop. 305, alt. 97 ft.), founded as logging towns in the late 19th century, lie just south of Highway 20.

CONCRETE (pop. 845, alt. 218 ft.), 22 miles east of Sedro-Woolley, straddles the Baker River just above its confluence with the Skagit. Its name recalls the Portland cement plants that operated here from 1892 to 1966. A 1916 concrete bridge over the Baker River at the east end of town, a forerunner of the use of concrete in bridge construction, still carries traffic. The Baker River drains the southern flanks of mounts Baker and Shuksan, 18 to 20 miles to the north, respectively. Two dams form Shannon and Baker lakes, heart of a popular recreation district. The **Puget Sound Energy Plant and Visitors Center**, on E. Main Street in town, has displays on the dam complex and area history.

East of Concrete population thins out. Stands of second-growth timber alternate with scattered farmland. **ROCKPORT STATE PARK** (*Discover Pass required, see p. 4*), eight miles east of Concrete, offers camping, fishing and hiking. The park contains 600 acres of old growth forest; some of the trees are 280 feet tall. An 8-mile gravel road leads to a trailhead where a 3-mile trail switchbacks up to the top of Sauk Mountain. The summit provides panoramic views of the Skagit River and North Cascades peaks.

Note: As of July 2011, a **Washington Discover Pass** is required for admission to day-use areas of state parks, as well as areas administered by the state Department of Fish & Wildlife and the Department of Natural Resources.

The fee is \$10/car for a one-day pass, or \$30 for an annual pass. Purchase the pass from any State Parks regional office or at the park itself when staff is available. Click www.discoverpass.wa.gov for details on other methods of purchase, including over 600 locations where hunting and fishing licenses are sold (transaction fees apply). A \$99 fine can be levied against drivers of street-legal vehicles caught without a Pass.

Overnight campers in state parks need not purchase the Discover Pass for the nights they're camping.



Eagles at Milepost 100 east of Rockport
[Photo: Skagit River Bald Eagle Interpretive Center]

The village of **ROCKPORT** (pop. 110, alt. 275 ft.), at the base of 5,537-foot Sauk Mountain, was the western terminus of the railroad which connected the isolated Seattle City Light community of Newhalem with the outside world. Today, the town bills itself as the state's *Bald Eagle Capital*.

One of the great natural spectacles of the Northwest takes place each winter as bald eagles gather along the region's coastal rivers to feed on spawned out salmon. The annual gathering along the upper Skagit River, primarily from Concrete to Marblemount, is one of the two largest in the U.S. outside Alaska. You can spot the magnificent birds perched atop favored trees along the riverbank. Their white heads are easy to see against the brown and green vegetative backdrop. Morning is the best viewing time. Early to mid-January have traditionally offered the greatest number of eagles.

Some of the big birds start moving out in late January, but many linger through February, depending on the availability of salmon. It's not uncommon to spot a few eagles in December and March as well.

Howard Miller Steelhead Park in Rockport (just west of the SR-530 bridge) is a good vantage point for watching eagles. The park's **Skagit River Bald Eagle Interpretive Center** has natural history displays featuring bald eagles. The area hosts an annual **Upper Skagit Bald Eagle Festival** each January.

Alternate Approach to North Cascades Highway Arlington to Rockport (North & East via WA-530 – 51 miles)

Highway 530 offers an alternative approach to the North Cascades Highway between I-5 north of Marysville and SR-20 at Rockport.

At I-5 Exit 208, head east on SR-530 to **ARLINGTON** (pop. 18,620, alt. 116 ft.). The city stands just below the confluence of the north and south forks of the Stillaguamish River. Settlers homesteaded on the rich valley soils in the early 1860s. Railroads arrived in the 1880s and a station was established here under the name of Haller City. An adjacent town site was also platted as Arlington, named for the national cemetery near Washington, DC. Residents voted to consolidate the two settlements under the

name Arlington in 1903. The town prospered as a lumbering center and once ranked among the top producers of shingles.

Olympic Avenue leads through the pleasant business district. The **Stillaguamish Valley Pioneer Museum**, 20722 67th Ave. NE, has exhibits on the area's history.

East of Arlington the highway follows the North Fork Stillaguamish River through scattered woodland and farming country, passing a string of almost-forgotten hamlets, former stations on the now-abandoned railway. **OSO** (pop. 246, alt. 206 ft.), one of the few that still has an identity, was settled as Allen in the 1880s. The name was changed to the Spanish word for *bear* in the 1890s to avoid confusion with the Mason County town of Allyn. On 22 March, 2014, a rain soaked mountainside north of the river collapsed. A slide of mud and debris buried the highway and temporarily blocked the river. Forty-three people lost their lives in the disaster. Highway 530 had to be rebuilt and raised up to 20 feet in some sections. The road reopened in early October, 2014.

Scenic highlight of this route is the spectacular view of 6,630-foot Whitehorse Mountain, which rises abruptly from lush pasturelands south of the highway. Its flanks host some of the lowest-elevation glaciers in the Lower 48 states.

The highway continues east to **DARRINGTON** (pop. 1,485, alt. 566 ft.). Settlement dates back to the 1880s when the area was known first as Sauk Portage, later as The Burn (local Native Americans traditionally set fires to patches of woodland, which subsequently grew back as berry fields). The town, which sports a few buildings with Bavarian architectural motifs, serves as gateway to a vast recreation district in the surrounding Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. Early settlers from southern Appalachia brought their musical traditions west, which survives today in an annual **Bluegrass Festival** in mid-July.

At Darrington SR-530 turns north. Paralleling the Sauk River through mixed woodlands, we rejoin the North Cascades Highway at Rockport

Highway 20 leads east from Rockport, closely following the Skagit River. Milepost 100 pullout on SR-20 just east of town is an excellent vantage point for eagle watching. A Department of Wildlife reserve protects the riverine bald eagle habitat. Higher mountains close in on the river.



The Cascade Pass area is accessible by trail from the end of the Cascade River Road, which branches off Highway 20 at Marblemount [Photo: National Park Service]

MARBLEMOUNT (pop. 205, alt. 310 ft.), named for a nearby quarry, began as a gold rush camp during the Civil War. From here the Cascade River Road runs 22 miles east following its namesake stream. The last half of the road is gravel and at road's end a trail leads 3½ miles to Cascade Pass, offering spectacular views of peaks, glaciers and alpine meadows in the South Unit of North Cascades National Park. This is the only connected road that enters the national park. In 1896 a state board designated Cascade Pass as the route for a proposed road linking the Skagit and Methow valleys. Work on this road slowed during the 1930s. After World War II interest in a north cross-state highway increased and the state adjusted the final route to that followed by today's North Cascades Highway.

East of Marblemount we leave the last vestiges of civilization and enter **ROSS LAKE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA**. The L-shaped park extends along the Skagit River and the shore of Ross Lake, north to the Canadian border. The corridor separates the north and south units of **NORTH CASCADES NATIONAL PARK**. The North Cascades Highway does not actually enter the national park.

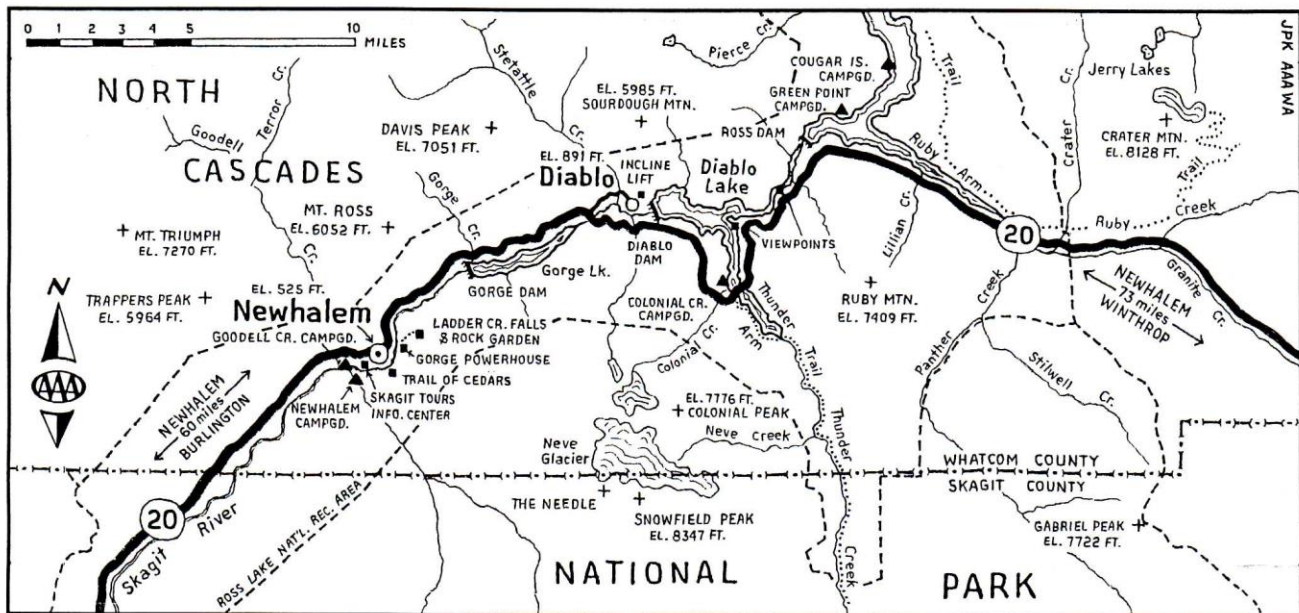
Highway 20 winds along the tumultuous Skagit River. The **North Cascades Visitor Center**, 3 miles west of

Newhalem, has information on the park's natural history and recreation. Just west of town are **Goodell** and **Newhalem** campgrounds, National Park Service sites that also offer picnicking and hiking.

NEWHALEM (pop. 350, alt. 525 ft.) is an attractive company town of frame houses and well-tended yards, built to house workers of Seattle City Light's hydroelectric complex in the canyon east of town. Turn off the highway onto Newhalem's Main Street, flanked by historic buildings. The **Skagit Information Center** has displays and interpretive material on the Skagit River project and area recreation. Pick up a copy of a self-guided walking tour of the area. The visitor center is also the starting point for City Light's popular **Skagit Tours**, offered on selected days from June through September. Reservations are recommended; phone (206) 684-3030. Across the street, the 1922 commissary houses the **Skagit General Store**. Just north is a Baldwin steam locomotive which served on the City Light railway from 1924 to 1954. Silk Stocking Row is a string of nine Craftsman-style bungalows built in the 1920s.

Main Street leads to a pedestrian suspension bridge across the Skagit River. On the opposite shore, **Trail of the Cedars** loops a half mile through a grove of old growth Western red cedar. From the Newhalem side of the suspension bridge, another trail follows a road east to a foot bridge across the Skagit. This leads to the **Gorge Powerhouse**, oldest of the City Light plants. The 1924 Art deco-style powerhouse contains a visitors gallery. The trail continues up to **Ladder Creek Falls and Gardens** where paths, steps and bridges nestle amid native plants. Illumination on summer evenings enhances a stroll through the gardens.

North Cascades Visitor Center, 3 miles west of Newhalem and just south of SR-20, has information on the park's natural history and recreation. There are several short accessible interpretive trails in the area. The Visitor Center is open early May to late October. Phone (206) 386-4495 ext.11.



East of Newhalem the canyon narrows and the Skagit takes on the character of a rushing mountain stream, tamed only by massive concrete dams. **GORGE DAM**, the first of the trio of dams forming the hydroelectric complex, rises 300 feet high and backs up the Skagit River for 4½ miles. The **Gorge Overlook Trail**, 3½ miles east of Newhalem, is an accessible interpretive loop with views of the dam and lake.

The highway closely follows the shore of Gorge Lake. Beyond the head of the lake, just below its namesake dam is **DIABLO** (pop. 50, alt. 891 ft.), another City Light company town. Skagit Tours participants are bussed from Newhalem to Diablo (one of the tours includes a family-style dinner in the Diablo Cookhouse). One of the most unusual components of the hydroelectric project's infrastructure is the **Incline Railway**. This "train elevator," part of an electric railway from Newhalem to Diablo, lifted freight cars 338 feet up the side of Sourdough Mountain at an angle of 34 degrees. At the top of the incline track continued to the edge of **Diablo Lake**, where barges transported the cargo to the Ross Dam construction site at the lakehead. Work on the incline started in 1927; train service ended in 1954. Skagit Tours included a ride on this unique lift until heightened security concerns

ended access to some of the area's sites in 2002.

DIABLO DAM rises 389 feet and was the tallest arch-type dam in the world when it was completed in 1930. This marked the end of the road until the mountain section of the North Cascades Highway opened to through travel in 1971. Construction began in 1960 to close the 51-mile gap between Diablo and Mazama.



Diablo Lake Overlook on Highway 20
[Photo: Skagit Tours]

Swinging around the lake's southern inlet (Thunder Arm), and passing Colonial Campground, the roadway climbs up to **Diablo Lake Overlook**. Here a sweeping panorama unfolds across Diablo Lake, deeply set amid steep, forested slopes. The reservoir's blue-green color attests to the glacial origin of its tributaries and is the product of the extremely fine sediment known as *rock flour*. To the south, hanging valleys high on the peaks beyond Thunder Arm contain Colonial and Neve glaciers.

Ross Dam Overlook is 3 miles up the road. **ROSS DAM**, 540 feet high, was built 1937-1940 (enlarged in 1953) and is the largest component of the Skagit River Project. Just east at Ross Lake Overlook, the view stretches north up the lake with high, snow clad peaks rising from both banks. The lake's surface is 1,600 feet above sea level. Dotting its shores are isolated

campgrounds, accessible only by boat or trail. The only lodging in this vast mountain area is **Ross Lake Resort**, a floating complex of cabins and bunkhouses. The resort, accessible by foot ferry, is open mid-June to October. East of this area the highway is gated and closed each winter season.

Leaving Ross Lake SR-20 follows first Ruby, then Granite creeks, gradually gaining altitude. This corridor, part of **Okanogan National Forest**, is a designated scenic byway. The route reaches the Pacific crest divide at 4,860-foot **Rainy Pass** (viewpoint, picnic area and a 1.4-mile hiking trail to scenic Lake Ann). The crest of the Cascade Range is a significant transition zone. To the west the more humid climate and lush vegetation reflect the Pacific's moderating influence. East of the crest, more extreme rigors of a continental climate produce scantier, more open vegetation. At the summit the **Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail** crosses the highway. This hiking route extends 2,650 miles between the borders of Canada and Mexico.

Between Rainy and Washington passes we enter the upper reaches of the Stehekin River, which drains south to the head of Lake Chelan. Three miles east of Rainy Pass, **Whistler Basin Viewpoint** provides an interesting view of alpine meadows on nearby 7,790-foot Whistler Mountain.



The distinctive spires of Liberty Bell Mountain seen from Washington Pass Overlook. Snow lingers on area trails into July.

Several miles beyond we reach **Washington Pass**, set in an amphitheatre of striking, rugged peaks, this is the highest point on the North Cascades Highway (5,477 feet). A ½-mile road leads to **Washington Pass Overlook**, where a spectacular panorama stretches from the rocky spire of Liberty Bell Mountain (elev. 7,790 ft.), along a range of high peaks, down the upper reaches of Early Winters Creek. The site has picnic tables, hiking trails and a visitor center (open summer only).

Late September through October brings good fall colors to the deciduous woodlands throughout the North Cascades. One of the more interesting trees native to this area is the western larch (*Larix occidentalis*). It grows in the colder climate regions from the high Cascades eastward to the Montana Rockies. Unlike most cone-bearing trees, the larch loses its needles in winter, providing a flush of yellow foliage

in autumn. Another tree typical to the region and remarkable for fall color is the quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*), whose white bark contrasts strikingly with brilliant gold leaves.

Beyond the pass SR-20 loops downward on 6 to 7 percent grades into the glacier-carved valley of Early

Winters Creek, which it follows 11 miles to the hamlet of **MAZAMA** (pop. 200, alt. 2,111 ft.). First called Goat Creek, Mazama anchors the western end of the Methow Valley. Its name derives from *Mazama sericea*, the former scientific designation for mountain goat. At the turn of the 20th century, the area enjoyed a brief gold mining boom. Methow comes from an American Indian term meaning *sun*. On 30 December, 1968, the two Methow Valley towns of Mazama and Winthrop recorded a temperature of -48°F , the all-time record low reading for Washington.

Side Trip – Harts Pass

From Mazama, Forest Road 5400 leads 20 miles northwest to **Harts Pass**, an area replete with old mine remnants. The road, pushed through in 1890 to serve gold camps, is winding and narrow in places – no trailers allowed beyond the 10-mile point. At the 6,198-foot summit a side road winds up nearly to the top of **Slate Peak** on the edge of the vast **Pasayten Wilderness**. Reaching 7,440 feet, this is the highest automobile road in Washington. The rooftop view is panoramic. Harts Pass Road usually opens in July and closes with autumn's first major snowfall.

From Mazama SR-20 parallels the rushing Methow River through stands of ponderosa pine and white-barked quaking aspen. Ponderosa, also known as western yellow pine, attains heights in excess of 200 feet and is widespread throughout the drier forest lands from southern British Columbia into northwestern Mexico. Prized for its timber, ponderosa pine forms the backbone of the forest products industry in the western interior.

The upper Methow Valley has the distinction of having recorded Washington's coldest temperature: -48°F on the morning of December 30, 1968, at both Mazama and nearby Winthrop.



*Winthrop's buildings recall the Old West
[Photo: Winthrop Chamber of Commerce]*

WINTHROP (pop. 430, alt. 1,765 ft.) is a restored frontier mining town with wooden sidewalks and false-front buildings. The town dates back to a trading post established in 1891 and has become a popular tourist destination, attracting visitors with its Old West look and numerous dining and lodging choices. Author Owen Wister lived in Winthrop briefly in the early 20th century, describing the community in his novel *The Virginian*.

The Forest Service operates the **Methow Valley Information Center** on SR-20 west of town. The **Shafer Museum**, off SR-20 at 285 Castle Avenue, has several pioneer structures, including town founder Guy Waring's 1897 log cabin. Its collection features antique vehicles and early mining equipment.

Winthrop National Fish Hatchery, a mile south of town, provides insights into the salmon and trout rearing process. Winthrop serves as an outfitting point for a wide variety of outdoor recreation including fishing, hunting, river rafting, hiking, pack trips and cross-country skiing. **Pearrygin Lake State Park** (*Discover Pass required, see p. 4*), 3 miles north, offers camping, fishing, boating and swimming along two miles of shoreline.

Ten miles west of Winthrop on Patterson Lake Road stands **Sun Mountain Lodge**, a AAA Three Diamond resort. The lodge is a winter and summer destination featuring both traditional lodge rooms as well as 16 cabins nestled beside Patterson Lake. Activities on-site include mountain biking, horseback riding boating and a full-service spa. Wintertime guests can enjoy cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and sleigh rides. The Sun Mountain Lodge Dining Room has earned the AAA Four-Diamond rating.

Highway 20 follows the right bank of the Methow River 9 miles to **TWISP** (pop. 950, alt. 1,590 ft.), largest town in the Methow Valley. Gold drew prospectors to the area in the late 19th century and when mining quickly diminished former prospectors became loggers, ranchers and farmers. The Eastside Winthrop-Twisp Road, on the opposite side of the river from SR-20, passes **North Cascades Smokejumper Base**, a training facility for aerial firefighting. The area is considered the *Birthplace of Smokejumping*, a strategy to get firefighters to remote areas. The first jumps took place in fall of 1939. The base offers guided tours from July through September.

3. Along the Columbia Southbound: Twisp to Wenatchee (91 miles)

Three miles east of Twisp, turn south on SR-153, which follows the Methow River 31 miles to its confluence with the Columbia. The lower Methow Valley has a drier, warmer climate and orchards alternate with ranch pasturelands. The rugged profile of the high Cascades marks the distant northwestern horizon. **Alta Lake State Park**, a couple miles south of the highway, is set amid pine woods. The park, closed in winter, offers camping, fishing and a golf course.

Highway 153 ends at the junction with US-97 at **PATEROS** (pop. 560, alt. 776 ft.). Settlement started here beside the **Columbia River** in 1886. First called Ives Landing, for town founder Lee Ives, it was changed to honor a town in the Philippines, where Americans served during the Spanish-American War. Steamboats plied the Columbia until the coming of the railroad in the 1910s. The settlement had to be relocated after Wells Dam flooded the site in 1968. The area suffered the largest wildfire in Washington's history in 2014. The Carlton Complex Fire started on 15 July and consumed more than 250,000 acres before it was controlled on 7 August.

U.S. Highway 97 heads south following the right bank of the Columbia. The green of irrigated orchards in the lowlands along the river softens the starkness of this barren landscape. Spring too brings a flush of green to the otherwise brown grasslands of this semi-arid region. Just above **AZWELL** (pop. 152, alt. 708 ft.) is **Wells Dam**, a large hydrocombine incorporating spillways, fish ladders and an electrical switchyard. A park overlooking the dam has interpretive displays, picnic shelters and restrooms. When the Great Northern Railroad built its line in the 1910s, it named a station here for Alfred Z. Wells, an early settler and orchardist.

Five miles south of Azwell, US-97 splits. The main highway continues at river level, then crosses the Columbia to run along the east bank to Wenatchee. Our route follows US-97 Alternate (US 97A), which begins a long climb above the river's west bank. This ridge is a glacial moraine, deposited at the lower end of Lake Chelan during the last Ice Age. From the heights a sweeping panorama unfolds back across the Columbia, 400 feet below.

Just beyond the crest of the ridge we enter **CHELAN** (pop. 4,115, alt. 1,238 ft.), a resort town and farm trading center set amid orchards at the eastern end of Washington's largest natural lake. Its name derives from an American Indian word *Tsillan*, meaning 'blue water' or 'lake.' Woodin Avenue leads into the downtown district, flanked by shops, galleries, boutiques and cafés. A number of motels and lakefront resorts cater to visitors who come to enjoy the dry, sunny climate. Rainfall here averages less than 11 inches. The attractive surroundings contain more than a dozen wineries and wine touring is increasingly popular.

The Lake Chelan Chamber of Commerce has a **Visitor Center** at 120 E. Johnson Avenue; phone (800) 424-3526. The U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service have an Information Center at 428 W. Woodin Avenue.



Benson Vineyards overlook Lake Chelan, 5 miles northeast of Chelan via SR-150.

Attractions in town include: **Don Don Morse Park** with a beach and campground; **Lake Chelan Museum**, at Woodin and Emerson streets, chronicles area history; **Riverfront Park** has pleasant walkways along the Chelan River downstream from the Woodin Avenue Bridge; **Slidewaters**, west of town on US-97A, is a water park open from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day. Note the interesting log architecture of **St. Andrew's Church** (Episcopal) at 120 E. Woodin Avenue.

Summer brings throngs of visitors to Chelan, especially to enjoy recreation on the lake. Swimming, water skiing, parasailing and all manner of boating are popular. Rentals are available. **Chelan Sky Park**, on Chelan Butte south of town, is a popular hang gliding area. In winter, snowmobiling and skiing are available. **Echo Valley Ski Area**, 7 miles north of SR-150 via Boyd Road, offers

downhill skiing weekends and holidays from mid-December into late February.

The biggest draw of the area is spectacular **Lake Chelan**. Ranging in width from a quarter mile to two miles, it

stretches 55 miles northwestward into the wilderness heart of the rugged North Cascades. Glacial action carved this long, narrow trough. The lake is 1,486 feet deep (after Crater Lake and Lake Tahoe, this is the third deepest in the U.S.) and its bottom is as much as 400 feet below sea level. Its shore rises to benches and taller mountains beyond. In the desert-like climate of its eastern end, these slopes are clad in grass and shrub. Moving uplake, the climate becomes more humid and forests of pine and fir cloak the mountains. The upper reaches form part of the **Lake Chelan National Recreation Area**, administered by the National Park Service. \

SIDE TRIP TO MANSON

A drive along the shore of Lake Chelan to Manson is a scenic delight. From downtown Chelan follow SR-150, which passes through orchards and vineyards that dot the low hills flanking the lake. In places the road hugs the shoreline. Summer cottages cling to the hillsides and line the shore. Small wineries process the harvest of the district, which has applied to be a federally designated wine growing region. Most are open for tasting and a few offer informal tours.

Mill Bay Casino, just north of the highway on Wapato Lake Road, beckons with games of chance. Eight miles west of Chelan we enter **MANSON** (pop. 950, alt. 1,160 ft.). Logs were formerly rafted down the lake to a sawmill which formed the early nucleus of the settlement. **Manson Bay Park**, on Highway 150 and Pedosi Street, has lake access and a swimming beach. The marina is popular with boaters. The adjacent downtown area features shops and cafés.

Paved roads loop through the orchard-covered hills north of Manson, a district at its most spectacular during the spring apple blossom period (late April into early May). Three small lakes – Dry, Roses and Wapato – nestle among the hills and offer trout and bass fishing. **Banjo Creek Farms**, 2½ miles north of town at 4848 Green Avenue, is a family fun center with gold panning, a petting zoo, wagon rides, winter sleigh rides and other activities; phone (509) 687-0532.

BOAT TRIP TO STEHEKIN

The **Lake Chelan Boat Company** has provided transportation on the lake since the 1890s. Their two vessels – *Lady of the Lake II* and *Lady Express* – offer passenger service from Chelan to the isolated communities on the upper lake. Their dock is on US-97A, just west of Chelan; phone (509) 682-2224.

Most remote of these settlements is **STEHEKIN** (pop. 80, alt. 1,120 ft.) near the lake's northern end. Its lakeside setting amid towering 8,000-foot mountains is stunning. Settled by prospectors in the late 1880s, the town has never had a road connection to the outside world. Access is by boat or float plane.



Stehekin, whose Indian name translates as “the way through,” has a collection of accommodations (lodges and cabins), grocery store, post office and restaurant. Horseback riding and mountain bike rentals are available.

Lake Chelan National Recreation Area wraps around the northern end of the lake and extends north along Stehekin River and Rainbow Creek. The **Golden West Visitor Center**, a few minutes walk from the boat dock, has information on sights and recreation in the park. Behind the center, the 0.8-mile **Imus Creek Nature Trail** climbs 500 feet up the hillside for a panoramic view of the lake and its mountain backdrop.

From late May to early October a shuttle bus runs on the Stehekin Valley Road as far as High Bridge. It provides access to trailheads and backcountry campgrounds. **Rainbow Falls** (*photo at left*), 3½ miles along Stehekin Valley Road, is a scenic highlight. Its total drop is 470 feet; the main falls plunges 312 feet.

From Chelan, US-97A runs along the lake shore, passing Tsillan Cellars and Chelan Estate Vineyards wineries. Three miles west of town the highway turns south away from the lake, following Knapp Coulee, an ancient channel that once drained Lake Chelan.



Lake Chelan State Park offers picnic sites and a campground at the edge of the lake.

Our route follows SR-971, which continues another 6 miles along the lake to **Lake Chelan State Park**. The popular park offers camping, picnic sites and 6,000 feet of shoreline with a sandy swimming beach. The South Lakeshore Road continues another 10 miles to **Twenty-Five Mile Creek State Park**, featuring campsites, a marina and store. Boaters launch here, heading to the upper reaches of Lake Chelan. The *Lady of the Lake II* stops at a dock nearby en route to Stehekin. This marks the end of the lakeside road.

Highway 971 follows Navarre Coulee from Lake Chelan State Park south to the Columbia River. The coulee is another ancient water channel that drained Lake Chelan to the Columbia River. Returning to river level, we join US 97A, which runs along the west bank of the Columbia – this stretch of river is slackwater behind Rock Island Dam. Several miles south towering cliffs crowd the shore. **Earthquake Point** (interpretive sign on west side of highway) marks the site of a

quake-caused landslide that dammed the great river for several days in December, 1872.

Several miles south the **Columbia Breaks Fire Interpretive Center** contains the former Chelan Butte Fire Lookout. Interpretive displays describe lookout duty and firefighting efforts in the region.

Orchards surround **ENTIA T** (pop. 1,180, alt. 800 ft.), spread out along the railroad tracks beside the Columbia. Its name, a Salish word meaning ‘rapid water,’ recalls Entiat Rapids, a hazard to early steamboat navigation before channel improvements were made in the early 1900s. The area was a popular campsite for Columbia River Chinook Indians. Prospectors roamed the area and the tributary valleys off to the west in the 1860s.

In 1896, Chief Silico Saska sold his land to settlers, who established a town near the confluence of the Entiat River and the Columbia. Fire destroyed all but six of Entiat’s buildings in 1913. When the railroad opened in 1914 a new town grew up beside the tracks. A ferry operated across the river here until 1960. When Rocky Reach Dam was built in 1960, the town had to move again – this time to higher ground. **Entiat Park**, overlooking the river, offers camping, picnicking, swimming and boating. The small **Entiat Museum**, at the park’s north end, is open summer Saturdays.

SIDE TRIP TO ENTIAT VALLEY

A mile south of Entiat, just before the bridge, the **Entiat Valley Road** follows its namesake river deep into the high Cascades. Orchards fill the lower reaches of this long, narrow valley. Ten miles in is the hamlet of **ARDENVOIR** (pop. 130, alt. 1,280 ft.), established in 1919 around a sawmill. It moved to its present location in 1931. Continuing deeper into the mountains, the valley narrows and orchards give way to forest.

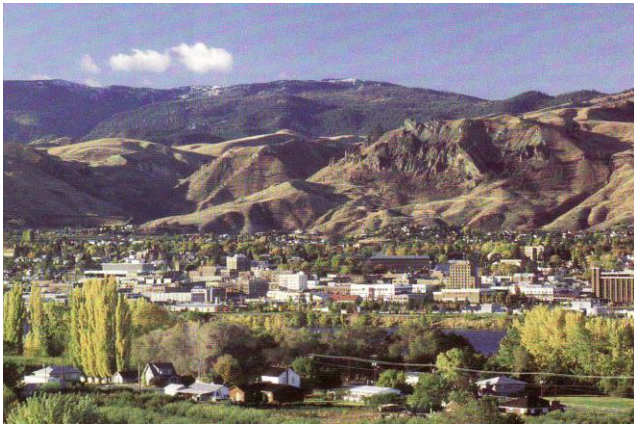
Two waterfalls make the upper valley drive worthwhile: **Preston Falls**, 13½ miles beyond Ardenvoir; and 140-foot **Silver Falls**, 9 miles farther. A ½-mile trail leads to a closer view of the latter.

At the southern edge of Entiat US-97A crosses the Entiat River, then closely follows the Columbia south to **Rocky Reach Dam**. Completed in 1961, the site is a number of attractions. **Rocky Reach Park** has beautiful seasonal flower beds and an arboretum containing 42 tree species. The Visitor Center, at the west end of the forebay wall, overlooks the mile-long fish bypass system. It features historical displays and a film about the hydrocombine. The **Museum of the Columbia**, on the fourth level of the powerhouse, has interactive exhibits illustrating the cultural history of the region from Native American times to the present. The visitor center and

museum are open daily mid-March to mid-November. To schedule a one-hour tour of the powerhouse, call (509) 663-7522.

South of Rocky Reach, traffic increases as we traverse an industrial district, the northern part of the Wenatchee urban area. U.S. Highway 2 joins our route – follow signage for Wenatchee. Highway 285 branches south, crosses the Wenatchee River and enters **WENATCHEE** (pop. 33,510, alt. 651 ft.). This becomes Wenatchee Avenue, which leads into the downtown area.

The city extends for over four miles along the west bank of the Columbia and spreads into the canyons and foothills of the mountains at its western edge. Together with East Wenatchee and other suburban communities, the district has nearly 60,000 people, making it the largest urban area in North Central Washington. The surroundings are attractive: orchards frame the suburbs and grasslands – golden brown in summer and lush green in spring – blend into pine woods that crown the heights. In winter, snow caps the mountains.



[Photo: Wenatchee Convention & Visitors Bureau]

The first settlers arrived in 1871, setting up a trading post on the banks of the Columbia River. In those years the only traffic was occasional pack trains headed for the mines in the distant interior Northwest. A town was platted in 1888 along Miller Avenue (between Fifth and Springwater), well above the river. It relocated closer to the Columbia when the Great Northern opened a station (at First and Columbia) on its new mainline in 1892. The community prospered as a supply and transportation point for the surrounding region.

For a decade settlers tried various small-scale schemes to bring water to the parched, but fertile earth. Finally, the Highline Canal was built in 1903, and by 1908 was transporting precious water to the East Wenatchee Bench by bridge. The span, at the foot of Bridge Street, is now open to bicycles and pedestrians. The orchard boom began. In the decade from 1900 to 1910, Wenatchee's population increased nearly ten-fold to 4,050

Wenatchee's soil and climate are ideal for apple growing. Indeed, although the industry has suffered in recent years from over production and low market prices, the city still bills itself as "Apple Capital of the World." The area's major annual event – the *Apple Blossom Festival* – occurs in early May. We'll get a much closer look at orchards when we traverse the Wenatchee Valley on the westbound leg of our Auto Tour.

There are many attractions in Wenatchee, making a visit worthwhile. Downtown Wenatchee has a collection of interesting buildings and shops. **Art on the Avenues** is an outdoor gallery featuring works on granite pedestals scattered throughout the downtown area. **Waterfront Park**, at the foot of Orondo Avenue, provides river access. The 11-mile **Apple Capital Trail** loops along both banks of the Columbia, crossing the river by two bridges. **Puybus Public Market**, opposite the park at 3 N. Worthen Street, houses restaurants, specialty shops and vendors in a former industrial building. **Wenatchee Valley Farmers Market** takes place here Wednesdays and Saturdays from April through October.

The **Wenatchee Valley Museum and Cultural Center**, downtown at 127 S. Mission Street, documents the history of the region from Native American times to the present. Among its highlights are a model of the Great Northern line through the Cascades and exhibits about the apple industry and the Pangborn-Herndon trans-Pacific flight. Nearby, 197-acre **Wenatchee Confluence State Park** offers camping, swimming and boating at the confluence of the Wenatchee and Columbia rivers. A pedestrian bridge spans the former stream.

Ohme Gardens, a mile north of the junction of US-2 and US-97, perches atop a rocky bluff overlooking the city and valley. Paths loop through carefully tended plantings recreating alpine and forest habitats, all the more striking given the garden's location in a desert climate. It's open daily from mid-April into mid-October.

Mission Street leads south to Squilchuck Road, which climbs into the mountains. Eight miles up, **Squilchuck State Park** (alt. 4,000 ft.) offers picnic tables and 10 miles of trails for hiking and mountain biking. In winter the park has a snow play area (sledding and tubing) and cross-country skiing. Four miles beyond the park is **Mission**

Ridge Ski Area (alt. 4,600 ft.), beckoning downhill skiers and snowboarders with four chairlifts. The season extends from late November into early April.

Wenatchee has a nice selection of lodgings and eateries. Conventions are popular and tend to fill hotel rooms, so advance reservations are recommended (contact your nearest AAA office to book a room).

4. Stevens Pass Highway

Westbound: Wenatchee to Everett (124 miles)

From the north end of the Wenatchee area, US-2/97 continues west. Cresting the top of a hill, the beautiful Wenatchee Valley unfolds. Closely flanked by mountains, the valley extends 20 miles northwestward to Leavenworth. South-facing slopes support grasses and scrub in the lower valley; farther west pine woods cloak the hillsides. Snowcapped heights crown the far western horizon. This is one of the nation's prime fruit growing districts, and orchards fill the valley and extend fingerlike into its peripheral canyons. During the spring blossom period – late April into mid-May – the valley is a sea of blooms.

The climate is particularly suited to apple growing, although cherries, pears, peaches and apricots are also raised. Apple varieties include Red and Golden Delicious, Granny Smith, Braeburn, Jonagold, Fuji, Gala and many others. Growers now use dwarf trees in high-density plantings to bring new orchards into production faster. This enables orchardists to get faster return on their investment and to respond more quickly to consumer demand for popular new varieties. The smaller trees also improve harvest efficiency because the apples are easier to reach (the crop is entirely handpicked). The harvest begins in mid-August and generally ends by early November. Washington apples are shipped throughout the U.S. and to more than 40 countries.

MONITOR (pop. 120, alt. 710 ft.) lies just south of the highway beside the Wenatchee River. The community was first called Browns Flats. The main industry here is obvious – stacks of apple boxes stand outside the packing sheds and storage warehouses that line the railroad tracks. The Wenatchee River above Monitor is one of Washington's most popular whitewater rafting streams. Most outfitters start near Leavenworth and stop at **Wenatchee River County Park**, just downstream from Monitor. The rafting season extends from May into September, although the river is at its highest and most exciting in late spring.



An apple orchard frames a view of Cashmere in the Wenatchee Valley [Photo: Cashmere Tourism and Development Group]

Three miles west, **CASHMERE** (pop. 3,040, alt. 795 ft.) stands in the heart of the Wenatchee Valley. Cashmere's first name – Old Mission – recalls the early Roman Catholic mission established in 1863 (nothing remains save the 1870s cemetery). Its present name derives from South Asia's fabled Vale of Kashmir. The orchard-filled valley, flanked by forested mountains with a backdrop of the snowcapped high Cascades provides a gorgeous setting.

At the east end of town the **Pioneer Village and Museum** features 20 authentic early structures, a working water wheel and one of the Northwest's most extensive collections of American Indian artifacts. Highway 2/97 Business Route follows Cottage Avenue into central Cashmere, passing tree-shaded streets and well-tended yards abounding in flowers. Downtown has a western look with lampposts and covered sidewalks.

Cashmere is renowned for *applets and cotlets*, a fruit and nut confection coated with powdered sugar. What started out as a roadside stand, founded by a pair of Armenian refugees who settled here in the early 20th century, evolved into a large commercial enterprise. The plant, known as **Liberty Orchards** (tours offered), is on Mission Avenue, a block south of Cottage. Two large antique malls – **Antique Mall at Cashmere** and **Apple Annie Antique Gallery** – are on opposite sides of Highway 2 at the east entrance to town.

The Cashmere area is renowned for its pear crops. The prime varieties are Bartlett and D'Anjou. On a trivia note, the geographic center of Washington is located 9 miles south of Cashmere at Red Hill. Several miles west of town the sandstone spires of **Peshastin Pinnacles State Park** stand just north of the highway. The park is a popular rock climbing area.

Orchards surround **DRYDEN** (pop. 500, alt. 977 ft.), just north of the highway. Great Northern Railway officials named the site in 1907 for a noted horticulturalist who speculated the area would be good for orchard crops. After a canal started providing irrigation water in 1912, orchards were planted on every available acre. Two miles west, US-97 strikes south, crossing a mountainous ridge to reach I-90 and Ellensburg. Our route follows US-2 the rest of the way west to Everett.

Just west of the junction, is **PESHASTIN** (pop. 900, alt. 1,010 ft.), another valley town on the banks of the Wenatchee River. Homesteading started in the upper Wenatchee valley in the late 1880s. The town was established when the Great Northern arrived in 1892. Its name derives from an Indian term 'Pish-pish-astin,' meaning broad-bottom canyon. Lumbering and fruit packing are the economic mainstays. There are also several wineries in the area.

Washington's Bavarian Village, **LEAVENWORTH** (pop. 1,990, alt. 1,180 ft.) nestles at the base of the Cascade Mountains near the western end of the Wenatchee Valley. Established in 1890, it prospered first as a railroad division point, then as a logging and fruit packing center. The Great Northern mainline formerly passed through Leavenworth and the railroad established a roundhouse and machine shops here. In the 1920s GN rerouted its tracks through Chumstick, in effect relegating Leavenworth to branch line status.



*Bavarian-style buildings line Front Street in Leavenworth
[Photo: Leavenworth Chamber of Commerce]*

By the early 1960s community leaders decided to convert Leavenworth into a tourist destination by capitalizing on its scenic setting. Gradually the town's appearance was transformed into a Bavarian village, complete with alpine architecture bedecked with flower-filled window boxes and hanging flower baskets.

Leavenworth is now one of the Northwest's most popular getaway destinations. **City Park**, downtown between Highway 2 and Front Street, is the heart of all the action. Bavarian-style buildings flank Front and its side streets. Dozens of shops, galleries, boutiques and restaurants cater to visitors. Art displays are set up in the park on summer weekends.

The **Upper Wenatchee Valley Museum**, 347 Division Street, has displays about the area's history. The unique **Nutcracker Museum** (735 Front Street, second floor) displays more than 5,000 nutcrackers.

Riverfront Park, accessed via an entrance at Seventh and Commercial, provides a playground, bandstand and a connection to the birders' paradise **Blackbird Island**. This three-acre island in the Wenatchee River teems with riparian vegetation and is a centerpiece of the Audubon Society's Great Washington Birding Trail. Foot bridges connect the island with both riverbanks. A shore-side path leads upstream to **Enchantment Park**, featuring a kids' fishing pond, playground and ball fields.

Major annual events include the *Washington State Autumn Leaf Festival* (late September), *Oktoberfest* (early October) and the *Christmas Lighting Festival* (first three weekends in December).

Area recreation includes hiking, fishing, camping, swimming, horseback riding, pack trips, whitewater rafting, snowmobiling and skiing. The Wenatchee River downstream from Leavenworth is one of Washington's most popular rafting streams. Relatively calm stretches alternate with class III and IV rapids. There are a dozen or so outfitters offering guided whitewater trips during the spring and summer.

The **Leavenworth National Fish Hatchery**, 2 miles southwest of town on Icicle Road, raises more than 1.7 million chinook annually. Established in the early 1930s to maintain fish stocks, its visitor center has displays on the life of the salmon (open daily 8am-4pm). The hatchery hosts a *Salmon Festival* in mid-September. Immediately west of Leavenworth, US-2 enters the narrow gorge of **Tumwater Canyon**, through which the Wenatchee River tumbles in a series of rapids and cataracts. Snow fed waterfalls grace the canyon walls and

spill from high peaks. The canyon sports spectacular displays of spring wildflowers and in fall brilliant flashes of autumnal foliage. Fires in the mid-1990s scorched the forest on the opposite bank, but recovery is underway. Leaving the canyon, US-2 runs through pine woods with patches of aspen.

At **COLES CORNER** (pop. 40, alt. 1,958 ft.), 16 miles beyond Leavenworth, SR-207 branches 4 miles north to **Lake Wenatchee State Park**. With over two miles of shoreline, the 498-acre park offers camping, picnicking, swimming, boating, fishing, water skiing and kayaking. Boat rentals and horseback riding are available. Twenty miles of trails are designated for hiking, biking and equestrian uses. In winter, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing are popular. Lake Wenatchee, the source of its namesake river, is set amid towering, forested peaks. The paved road continues beyond the park, following its north shore, lined with vacation homes and cottages. Gravel roads continue to trailheads and campgrounds.

Highway 2 continues west from Coles Corner, gradually gaining altitude. Douglas fir replaces ponderosa pine as the climate becomes more humid. After a dozen miles, we pass the **Berne Maintenance Facility**, where Washington Department of Transportation stores sand and gravel for winter road maintenance. Berne started as a construction camp during the building of the Cascade Tunnel.



Highway 2 glides through the Cascades over Stevens Pass [Photo: Stevens Pass Greenway]

Just under 2 miles beyond Berne the highway passes beneath the BNSF mainline and a 10-mile section of 4-lane highway begins. Soon we cross over the railroad near the east portal of the **Cascade Tunnel**. Opened in 1929, this 7.8-mile tunnel beneath the crest of the Cascades greatly facilitated rail travel. Until the advent of diesel in the mid-1950s, GN used electric engines to haul trains through the tunnel between Wenatchee and Skykomish.

Trains can only pass through the tunnel every 30 minutes, as the ventilation system, takes that long to clear the fumes. This was the longest railroad tunnel in the western hemisphere until the 8.1-mi. Connaught Tunnel opened on the Canadian Pacific line in eastern British Columbia in the late 1980s

STEVENS PASS (alt. 4,061 ft.) marks the crest of the Cascade Range. Streams to the east drain into the Columbia basin; to the west streams feed the Skykomish basin, tributary to Puget Sound. **Stevens Pass Ski Area** opened in 1937. The ski season extends from Thanksgiving into early April. **Stevens Pass Bike Park** operates from late May to early October.

The pass is named for John G. Stevens, a surveyor for the Great Northern Railroad. The first rail line opened in 1892, using switchbacks to get over the pass. Switchbacks avoided prohibitively steep grades, but their use was very time consuming. It required 13 miles of track, including switchbacks, to connect spots a mere three miles distant. In 1897 GN started construction of the first Cascade Tunnel, 1,000 feet below the pass. The 2.5 mi. tunnel opened in 1900, eliminating the switchbacks. Now abandoned, it was replaced by today's 7.8-mi. tunnel, a further 900 feet below the original bore.

A narrow paved road, part of the original Stevens Pass Highway, branches right just west of the summit. This is not a through route, since the bridge over the rushing Tye River is impassable. The bridge has been replaced with a pedestrian span, making this a popular hiking itinerary.

West of the pass, US-2 begins a long, gradual descent. Over a 4-mile distance the road drops over 2,400 feet on grades of 5 to 6 percent. Sweeping views extend across the alpine valley. The forest thins to meadows on the heights. In fall the slopes blaze with color. The avalanche chutes that scar the opposite ridges mask a chilling history. Early in the morning of February 22, 1910, a massive snow slide obliterated the hamlet of **Wellington**, located at the west portal of the original Cascade Tunnel. The avalanche swept two standing passenger trains to the bottom of the canyon, killing 118 people. Eager to avoid the obvious hazards of winter travel through the high mountains, the Great Northern shortly started work on the new Cascade Tunnel. After the Wellington disaster, the GN changed the name of the town to Tye. You can see some of the original alignment, including snowsheds, along the mountainside across the canyon west of the pass.

At the base of the grade Highway 2 turns west. **SCENIC** (pop. negligible, alt. 2,250 ft.), just off the left side of the highway, was formerly a railroad siding town. Scenic bustled during the construction of the new Cascade Tunnel. All that remains today are railroad sidings. In the mountains to the south is primitive **Scenic Hot Springs**. Several miles west the **Iron Goat Trail Interpretive Center** is housed in a restored GN caboose. The trail follows 9 miles of the old railroad right of way.

Two miles west, **Deception Falls** thunders through a narrow gorge just south of the road (parking and restrooms north of highway). A trail leads beneath the road to the falls.

SKYKOMISH (pop. 200, alt. 931 ft.), just south of US-2, straddles its namesake river. Founded in 1899, this was an important division point on the Great Northern, with railroad shops and a station to supply power to electric locomotives. Here trains switched motive power from steam to electricity for the run through the Cascade Tunnel. Aside from the railroad, Skykomish also boasted a sawmill and two shingle mills. During the 1920s the population swelled to 8,000 during to construction on the new Cascade Tunnel.

Despite the relatively low elevation, tin roofs on most of the town's buildings mark this as a snowy area. The railroad still dominates Skykomish and long freights rumble down the tracks, which parallels the old main street. The four-story **Cascadia Inn**, facing the tracks in the middle of town, opened its doors in 1904. **Great Northern & Cascade Railway**, 101 N. Fifth Street, offers a museum and free excursion rides on 1/8-scale model railroad on half-mile of track passing restored Skykomish station, through tunnels and other features representing original route through Stevens Pass. Rides offered Saturday-Sunday plus holidays May through October.

Continuing west, US-2 follows the rushing Skykomish River through a lush forest of western hemlock, red cedar and Douglas fir. The settlements along this stretch began as mining and timber camps in the last quarter of the 19th century. The scattered community of **GROTTO** (pop. 50, alt. 849 ft.) is named for a nearby mountain whose slopes contain cave-like ravines. Four miles west, **BARING** (pop. 233, alt. 770 ft.) straddles a long stretch of straight highway. Prospectors and miners scoured the district in the late 19th century. First called Big Index, then East Index, it was renamed for nearby Mount Baring, a 6,235-foot peak towering two miles east.

Highway 2 parallels the railroad tracks, occasionally offering glimpses of the Skykomish River foaming in its narrow, rocky gorge. Directly ahead looms the dramatic rock-girt tower of **Mount Index** (elev. 5,979 ft.). Bridal Veil and Sunset Falls spill off its lower slopes.

INDEX (pop. 165, alt. 532 ft.), a mile north of the highway, is a quiet town straddling the North Fork Skykomish River. Settled in 1890 and incorporated in 1907, it's named for the lofty finger of rock dominating the southern horizon. Several frame buildings date from the town's early years as a railroad and miner's supply center, including the Bush House (1898) and the Red Men's Wigwam (1903). The small **Pickett Historical Museum** has exhibits on the area. A giant saw, on display in the town park, was used to quarry granite from Index for the steps of the State Capitol in Olympia. The sheer cliffs north of town are popular with rock climbers and whitewater rafting is popular on the Skykomish.



Eight miles west is **GOLD BAR** (pop. 2,125, alt. 195 ft.), founded as a rowdy mining camp in the last years of the 19th century. It prospered as a logging and railroad town. A side road leads 2 miles north to **Wallace Falls State Park**, where a 2½-mile trail climbs to the brink of its 265-foot namesake waterfall.

West of Gold Bar the valley widens and the first farms appear. **STARTUP** (pop. 817, alt. 140 ft.) was first called Wallace, for a local lumber company. Repeated confusion with Wallace, Idaho prompted a name change in 1901 to honor George Startup owner of the town's sawmill.

← *Wallace Falls plunges into a wooded grotto near Gold Bar*

SULTAN (pop. 4,860, alt. 114 ft.) extends along the highway beside the railroad tracks and back into foothills to the north. Prospectors scoured the district in the last decades of the 19th century. The advent of the Great Northern in the early 1890s attracted permanent settlement. Shingle mills and logging camps dotted the surroundings. The town, and in turn the nearby river, recall the name of a local Native American chief, Tsul-tad

(or Tseul-tud). Sultan's main street, a block off US-2, has a collection of late 19th-century buildings from the town's early years.

MONROE (pop. 18,120, alt. 55 ft.), 8 miles west of Sultan, traces its beginnings to the late 1850s. The rich alluvial soils along the Snohomish and Snoqualmie rivers attracted homesteaders and a settlement sprang up. First called Park Place, it was renamed for President James Monroe in 1889. It prospered first off logging, later as a farm trading center. Today it's a fast-growing bedroom community at the eastern edge of the Puget Sound urban area.

Follow Main Street into the city's pleasant, well maintained central business district. **The Monroe Historical Museum**, in the former city hall at 207 E. Main Street, has displays on the area's history (open Monday, Wednesday and Saturday afternoons). Back on US-2, a mile east of Monroe, the **Washington Serpentarium** exhibits more than 50 snakes, including some of the world's deadliest.

West of Monroe the **Evergreen State Fairgrounds** hosts auto racing and a calendar of special events culminating with the *Evergreen State Fair*, a ten-day extravaganza ending on Labor Day. The grounds also house the **Western Heritage Center**, featuring interactive exhibits on mining, logging and pioneer life in the area. The museum is open Wednesdays-Sundays.

Southwest of Monroe the Skykomish joins the Snoqualmie forming the Snohomish River. Six miles beyond Monroe, take the exit for **SNOHOMISH** (pop. 9,670, alt. 64 ft.). This historic city occupies a sloping site overlooking its namesake river. Founded in 1859, it's one of the state's oldest cities and the commercial district and adjoining residential areas contain numerous fine examples of Victorian period architecture. The city adopted an historic preservation ordinance in 1973 and the following year a 36-block area was declared the **Snohomish National Historic District**.



Many of the of the old brick buildings lining First Street in historic downtown Snohomish contains antique shops



Side streets north of downtown are a treasure trove of residential Victorian architecture

The **Snohomish Visitor Center**, in the west end of downtown at 1301 First Street, has a wealth of information on the city. Snohomish bills itself as the "Northwest's Antique Capital" and a collection of shops and galleries lines First Street between Union Avenue and Avenue D. **Star Center Mall**, 829 Second Street, is the largest antique mall, with over 200 dealers. The **Blackman Historic Museum**, 118 Avenue B, is an 1878 residence with furnishings reflecting the mid-1890s (open weekends, April to late December).

Snohomish is the southern trailhead of the **Snohomish County Centennial Trail**. This 30-mile National Recreation Trail follows a former railroad right of way north through Lake Stevens and Arlington to the Skagit County line.

Highway 9 leads north from downtown Snohomish to US-2, which bypasses the city to the north. Follow US-2

west. The highway passes through woodlands and scattered suburban homes, then drops down to the floodplain of the lower Snohomish River. It crosses Ebey Island, formed by branches of the river. Some tracts of the island, named for the pioneer family of Isaac Ebey, are several feet below mean sea level and the highway is built on a trestle well above its flood-prone surface. The **Ebey Island Unit** of the **Snoqualmie Wildlife Area**, administered by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, covers 1,237 acres of wetland and grassy fields south of the trestle between Ebey Slough and the Snohomish River. The island's forest was logged in the 1890s but natural reforestation has reestablished one of the few remaining Sitka spruce swamps in the area. Outdoor activities include pheasant and waterfowl hunting, wildlife viewing, and walking along the Ebey Slough dike road (there are no established walking trails or footbridges).

Much of the unit is closed for waterfowl nesting and rearing habitat during the non-hunting season. To reach the Ebey Island, take the Home Acres Road exit from Highway 2. A Discover Pass or WDFW Vehicle Access Pass is required on all WDFW lands.

Spanning the main stream of the Snohomish River, US-2 returns to **EVERETT** completing our Northern Cascades Loop.

**KEEPING
INFORMED ON
THE ROAD**

Here is a listing of area
radio stations . . .

*translator station

CASHMERE
KZPH-FM – 106.7FM

CHELAN
KOZI – 1230AM
KNWR* – 91.7FM (NPR)
KOZI-FM – 93.5AM

EVERETT
KRKO – 1380AM
KSER-FM – 90.7FM

LEAVENWORTH
KOHO-FM – 101.1FM

MOUNT VERNON
KAPS – 660AM
KBRC – 1430AM
KMWS – 90.1FM (NPR)
KSVR-FM – 94.3FM

TWISP
KVLR-FM – 106.3FM

WENATCHEE
KPQ – 560AM
KRKT – 900AM
KWWX – 1340AM
KWNC – 1370AM
KNWR – 90.7FM (NPR)
KYSN-FM – 97.7FM
KAPP-FM – 99.5FM
KPQ-FM – 102.1FM
KWWW – 103.9FM
KKRV-FM – 104.7FM

jpk – 2 September, 2016