



AUTO TOUR

AAA Washington Travel Services

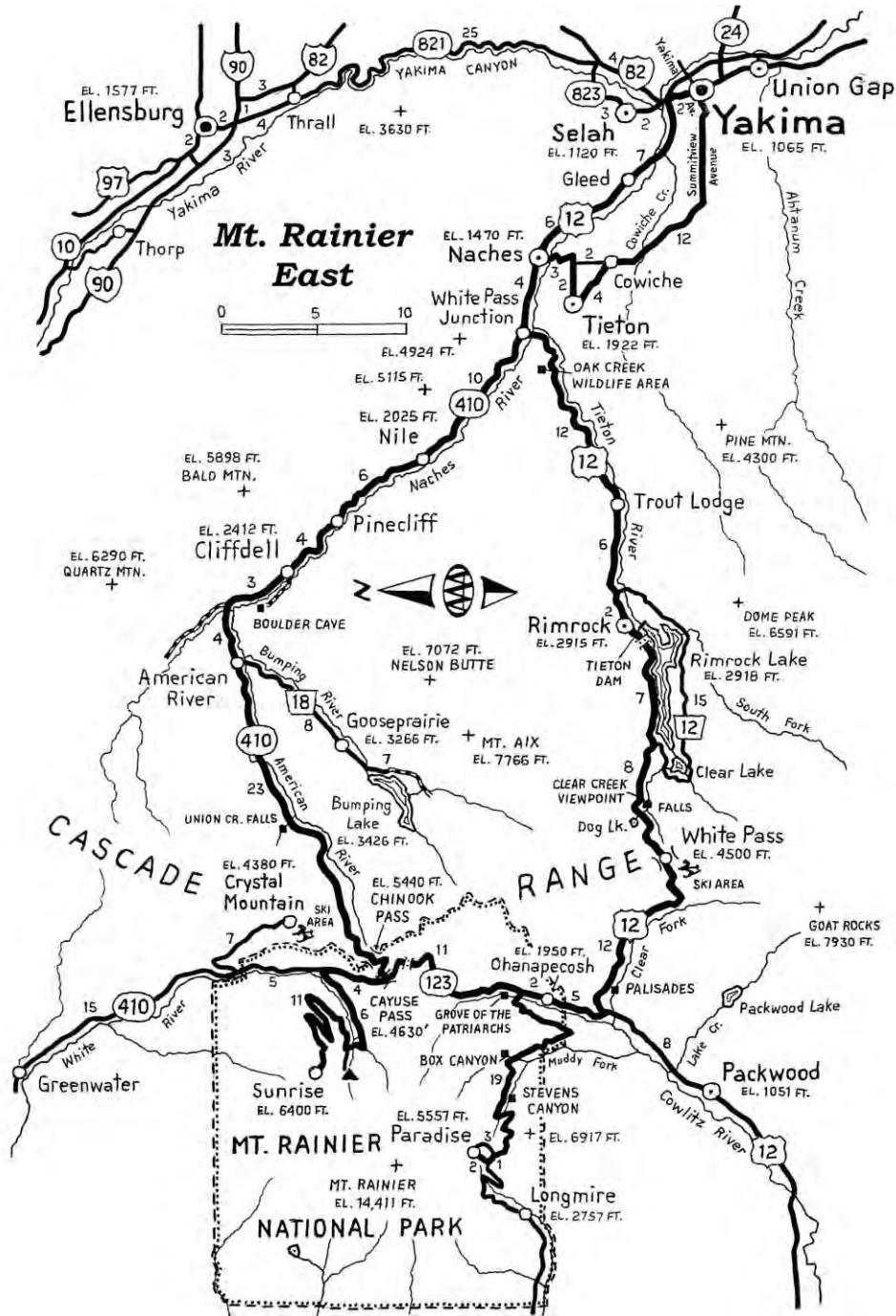
Mount Rainier - East

Mount Rainier, one of earth's great volcanic peaks, dominates the Washington Cascades. Its massive dome-like summit is the highest point in the Pacific Northwest – 14,411 ft. In clear weather Rainier is visible from distances of up to 150 miles. Congress set aside 378 square miles around the peak as the nation's fourth national park in 1899. The park includes an impressive array of natural zones. A dense forest of coniferous trees cloaks the lower slopes. At higher elevations alpine woodlands give way to open meadows. Higher yet is the realm of rock, talus slope and perpetual ice. The volcano supports the largest single-peak glacial system in the contiguous states.



Beginning in Yakima our auto tour follows the Naches River, passing from the irrigated farm and orchard lands of the upper Yakima Valley into the forested eastern foothills of the Cascades. Ascending the thickly wooded American River valley to the crest of the Cascades at 5,440-foot Chinook Pass, we enter Mount Rainier National Park. Dropping down to the White River entrance we climb again to the Sunrise area perched at timberline on the northeast shoulder of the volcano. Returning via Cayuse Pass the route winds down to Ohanapecosh we exit the park and follow US-12 up to the Cascade crest at White Pass, a popular winter sports area. A side trip from the Ohanapecosh area to Paradise is described. East of White Pass the highway traverses scenic pine woods, skirts Rimrock Lake, follows the Tieton River and returns to the semi-arid landscape of Central Washington. The standard auto tour covers 201 miles and takes about 5 hours to complete. Adding the side trip through Stevens Canyon to Paradise increases the figures to 243 miles and 6 hours.

During the snowy winter months (mid-November through May) sections of the tour's itinerary are closed to vehicular traffic. These areas include SR-410 west of American River, Chinook and Cayuse passes, Sunrise Road and Stevens Canyon Road. Check with your AAA store for opening and closing dates.



1. Yakima to Gooseprairie

Our auto tour begins in **YAKIMA** (pop. 93,080, alt. 1,065 ft.), the metropolis and primary trading center of the central part of the state. The city is located in the Upper Yakima Valley on the right bank of its namesake river, set amid an oasis of

irrigated orchards and farmland. For more information on the city, consult AAA Washington's *Yakima River and Canyon Auto Tour*.

From downtown proceed west on Yakima Avenue. It becomes Summitview Avenue and leads through pleasant, older residential neighborhoods. Beyond the newer suburban developments orchards stretch westward a dozen miles to the Cascade foothills. During April and May blossoms of apricot, cherry, peach, plum, pear and apple (Washington's dominant crop) delight the senses. The fruit harvest season, which extends from mid-June into October, brings the valley's bounty to area markets and roadside stands.

The county road runs through **COWICHE** (pop. 430, alt. 1,749 ft.) and **TIETON** (pop. 1,255, alt. 1,922 ft.), two small farm trading towns located in a sea of orchards. On the western horizon loom the snowy domes of **Mount Adams** (alt. 12,307 ft.) and **Mount Rainier** (alt. 14,411 ft.). Mount Saint Helens (out of sight to the right of Adams) bestowed a heavy dusting of volcanic ash on the Yakima Valley subsequent to its cataclysmic eruption on May 18, 1980.

In 2005 a Seattle art book publisher started Mighty Tieton, an initiative to revitalize its namesake community by encouraging artisan businesses like light manufacturing and hospitality enterprises. The group has purchased several buildings and properties close to town center and is attracting artists, designers, crafts people and retailers. The former church is now a community hall, an activities and events venue.

From Tieton the road winds down a pine-dotted ridge into the lower Naches River Valley where it joins US-12. The nearby town of **NACHES** (pop. 815, alt. 1,467 ft.) developed as a trading center in the early 20th century when irrigation works enabled farmers to plant orchards along the river and on nearby foothills. On the west edge of town stands the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest's **Naches Ranger Station**. A stop at this office will yield a wealth of information on area recreation.

Proceed west on Highway 12. Sagebrush and bunchgrass cloak the high rounded hills that flank the valley. In spring their verdant slopes are alive with wildflowers. Summer's heat turns the grasses golden. Several miles west of Naches we pass the last of the orchards. The first stands of ponderosa pine signal our transition to the forest realm.

At White Pass Junction bear right on SR-410, the scenic **Chinook Pass Highway**, which traces the Naches River for 23 miles. This is a popular trout fishing area and numerous campgrounds dot the route. Outcrops of basalt, hardened ancient lava flows, flank the increasingly narrow canyon. The river disappears behind the thick stands of pine. This also marks the beginning of the **Mather Memorial Parkway**, a fifty-mile stretch of the highway authorized by Congress in 1931. Its namesake is Stephen Mather (1867-1930), first director of the National Park Service, who also advocated for improved road access to the parks.

Beyond the rugged peak of Edgar Rock, probably the core of an ancient volcano, is **CLIFFDELL** (pop. 105, alt. 2,490 ft.), an area of vacation homes and modest resorts. Watch for the Naches River Road junction on the left. After crossing the river this gravel road leads 1.2 miles to the **Boulder Cave Picnic Area**.



Looking out one of the two entrances to Boulder Cave from its dark interior [Photo: U.S. Forest Service]

A $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile interpretive trail winds up to the upper entrance to Boulder Cave. An ancient landslide forced Devil Creek to carve the cave into a soft layer of loose sediment between layers of more resistant basalt lava. The subsequent collapse of the upper layer formed the cave. This is the largest cave of its kind in the Northwest, measuring 400 feet long and 30 feet wide. It has two openings – the main trail leads to the upper entrance. Follow the rough trail through the cave to the exit at the lower entrance where stairs lead up to the main trail. Safe exploration requires sturdy shoes and a flashlight.

The site is open from late May to early September; it's closed from October into late May to protect hibernating bats. Just upstream is **Devil Creek Falls**, viewed through an amphitheater of trees. Another higher waterfall is $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile farther upstream (no trail access).

Three miles beyond Cliffdell, Highway 410 turns west and begins its ascent of the American River drainage. At the hamlet of **AMERICAN RIVER** (pop. nil, alt. 2,812 ft.) Forest Road 18 branches south and follows the Bumping River into a densely

wooded recreation region. At **GOOSE PRAIRIE** (pop. 40, alt. 3,248 ft.) a community of summer cabins and a Boy Scout camp nestle in a glen at the base of high peaks. The 167,000-acre **William O. Douglas Wilderness**, named for the state's first U.S. Supreme Court Justice, surrounds the valley. Pavement ends at **Bumping Lake** which offers fishing, boating, hiking trails and several campgrounds. Return to Highway 410 to continue the tour.

2. Mt. Rainier National (via Chinook Pass)

As Highway 410 gains elevation the forest takes on more alpine characteristics with stands of lodgepole pine and western larch. Ten miles west of the Bumping River Road junction a trail leads ¼ mile to 50-foot **Union Creek Falls**.

Several miles west of here the highway begins a long but gradual ascent of the valley's flank. Various turnouts offer interesting panoramas. Note the valley's U-shape – the characteristic profile of alpine glaciation. Another interesting legacy of the Ice Age is the numerous hanging valleys which you can observe on the opposite flank of the main valley. These formed where the small tributary glaciers met the glacier occupying the main valley. Ahead the highway climbs up to **Chinook Pass** (alt. 5,432 ft.) which marks the crest of the Cascade Range. The **Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail** bridges the highway at the 5,440-foot mark.



Mount Rainier reflected in Tipsoo Lake
[Photo: National Geographic]

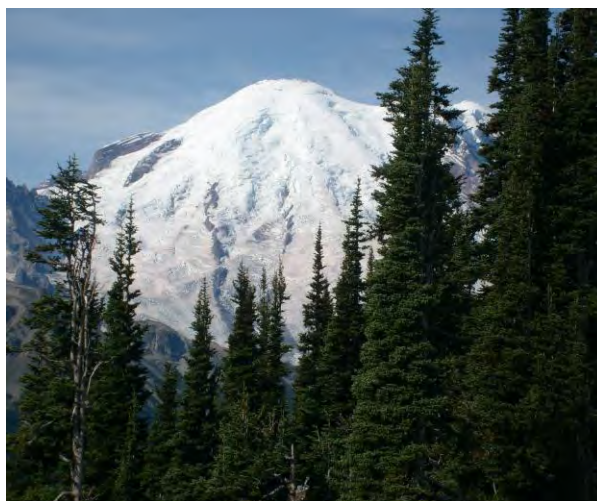
As we enter **MOUNT RAINIER NATIONAL PARK** a breathtaking panorama unfolds. In the foreground **Tipsoo Lake** (elev. 5,299 ft.) fills a shallow glacial trough. Meadows brilliant with summer wildflowers fringe its shores. Stands of pyramidal Engelmann spruce dot the meadow. Beyond, the massive crown of Mount Rainier, with its diadem of glaciers and snowfields, towers above the stony crags of the Cowlitz Chimneys. A 3.5-mile round trip loop trail leads from the lake around the summit of Naches Peak (elev. 5,849 ft.) for more stupendous views. Allow two hours for the hike. The trail is usually negotiable in late July until autumn's first accumulating snows.

In a series of switchbacks the highway descends over 800 feet to **Cayuse Pass** (alt. 4,694 ft.). At Cayuse Pass turn right on SR-410. Two and a half miles down the road a turnout provides an imposing view. Forested ridges frame the White River drainage. The river springs from Emmons Glacier which spills down the east flank of Mount Rainier.

The White River Road branches west, running alongside its namesake stream through a lush forest of Douglas fir, western red cedar and western hemlock to the **White River Campground**, tucked away in a deep, glacier-carved valley. Here the **Sunrise Road** begins an eleven-mile, serpentine climb of 3,000 vertical feet through an alpine forest of spruce and fir. Completed in 1929 and later augmented by early efforts of the Civilian Conservation Corps, the road was one of the first master-planned roads in the National Park System. The Sunrise Road area is normally open only from June through mid-October.

Stop at **Sunrise Point** for a sweeping panorama of Rainier's sister Cascade volcanoes – Glacier Peak and Mount Baker to the north; mountains Adams, St. Helens and Hood lie to the south. Here at timberline, scattered stands of pyramidal Engelmann spruce mingle with alpine meadows at their peak bloom in July and August. The road ends at the **Sunrise National Historic District**, a series of seven buildings, erected in the 1930s and 40s. Located at an elevation of 6,400 feet and set amidst meadows known as Yakima Park, this is the highest point accessible by paved road in the state.

The **Sunrise Visitor Center** has exhibits of natural history. Nearby **Sunrise Lodge**, built in 1931 as the first wing of a planned hotel, today offers food and beverage service. A complex of housekeeping cabins formerly bordering the lodge was removed in the 1940s. A variety of trails traverse an alpine wonderland of meadows and groves of trees, offering stunning close-hand views of Mount Rainier's glaciers. The **Burroughs Mountain Trail** climbs above the timberline into an alpine tundra.



Emmons Glacier viewed from Sunrise Visitor Center

Back at Cayuse Pass, Highway 123 drops steeply into the Ohanapecosh River Valley offering occasional views of Rainier and distant Mount Adams. Just down the road **OHANAPECOSH** (pop. nil, alt. 1,950 ft.) has a seasonal visitor center (one of only two located outside the park's fee-paying zone) and campground. The area once had a hot springs resort with a lodge and cabins. Trails lead from the visitor center to the springs and Silver Falls.

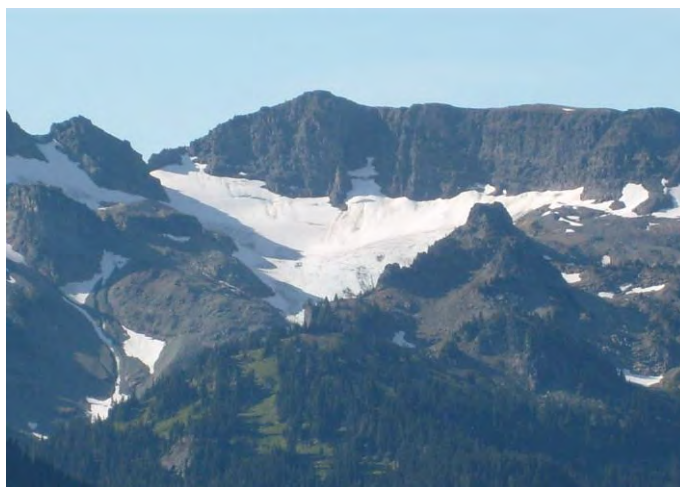
Side Trip – Paradise

Two miles north of Ohanapecosh, turn west on the **STEVENS CANYON ROAD**. This road connects SR-123 with the Paradise area and is open from in late May or early June until the first major snows in the fall. At the **Grove of the Patriarchs**, just inside the Stevens Canyon entrance station, trails lead through a stand of thousand-year-old Sitka spruce.

The road first winds around the south end of Backbone Ridge. At **Box Canyon** (*pictured at left*) it bridges the Muddy Fork of the Cowlitz River. The gorge is 180 feet deep and only 13 feet wide, producing a pronounced *whoosh* as the Cowlitz roars through it confines far below.



Box Canyon



Sarvant Glacier clings to the side of the Tatoosh Range

The road continues west through Stevens Canyon proper, a treasure trove of alpine glacial features. To the southwest the **Tatoosh Range** lifts its rugged profile (*Sarvant Glacier pictured below*). This type of feature is known as an *arête*. Individual peaks of the ridge are called *horns*; their intervening passes are *cols*. Oval basins at the base of these peaks, gouged out by the erosional force of long-receded glaciers, are known as *cirques*. Lakes that form in such basins are *cirque lakes*. Sometimes they form a chain, and are known as *pater noster lakes*, for their resemblance to beads on a rosary.

Hanging valleys form beneath tributary glaciers – the cliffs at their base are often a springboard for waterfalls. **Fairy Falls**, well north of the road and beyond our view, is the park's highest with a total drop of 700 feet. Its flow varies greatly at different times of year. Our route skirts several *tarns*, or alpine lakes. Two such features – **Louise Lake** and **Reflection Lake** – offer hiking trails.

Beyond Reflection Lake the road winds up to **PARADISE** (summer pop. 300, alt. 5,557 ft.), located at timberline amid splendid alpine meadows on the volcano's southern flank. The historic **Paradise Inn**, a sprawling lodge of wood and stone built in 1917, offers seasonal lodging and dining. The inn and five other structures form the **Paradise Historic District**. Note the 1920 Guide Service Building with its distinctive gambrel roof.

The **Paradise Visitor Center** features displays of the park's natural history. A network of trails branch out from Paradise – most lead upwards, through meadows dotted with trees; some climb above the tree line to snowfields and glaciers. The views are magnificent. The wildflowers are at their best in July and August. Due to the melting of the glaciers in the area, the famous Paradise Ice Caves no longer exist. In winter visitors can practice Nordic skiing, take snowshoe hikes and enjoy the **Paradise Snow Play Area**.



The colorful wildflower meadows near Paradise are a riot of color in summer [Photo: National Park Service]



Paradise Inn reflects an alpine variant of the National Park Rustic style of architecture [Photo: National Park Service]

To continue our Auto Tour itinerary back to Yakima, retrace the Stevens Canyon Road. Repeating this route will offer different perspectives of its magnificent alpine scenery.

3. White Pass to Yakima

From Ohanapecosh SR-123 continues south to US-12. Turn east on Highway 12 which climbs through dense woods to White Pass. 2.3 miles east of the SR-123/US-12 junction watch for the turnout on your right for **The Palisades**. Here the Clear Fork of the Cowlitz River has cut a deep gorge into an ancient lava flow, exposing an impressive 486-foot cliff of columnar basalt. The regular jointing of this feature is a product of the lava's slow cooling.

The highway continues its eastward climb through a forest of alpine fir. At several points there are good views south to **Goat Rocks**, a 106,000-acre wilderness of rugged terrain. Several miles east is **WHITE PASS** (pop. 30, alt 4,500 ft.), a recreation community straddling the crest of the Cascades a dozen miles southeast of Mount Rainier National Park. The highway opened through the pass in 1951 and is kept open through the snowy winter months. The area offers hiking, fishing, pack trips and a full range of winter sports. **White Pass Ski Area** offers daily skiing from late November/early December into April. Six chairlifts, including three quads, serve 45 runs and 1400 skiable acres and a terrain park. Nordic skiers have access to eleven miles of trails.

Two-and-a-half miles east of the pass US-12 skirts **Dog Lake**, set in a forest of western larch. South of the highway **Clear Creek Overlook** offers a spectacular vista. As you approach the precipice the earth abruptly falls away – Clear Creek plunges over the brink into a wooded grotto 300 feet below. To the east the canyon widens and in the distance is **Clear Lake**.

Highway 12 descends the U-shaped valley. A turnout on the right offers a good view back to Clear Creek Falls. As we lose elevation the forest increasingly displays arid characteristics. Pine replaces fir – a dense bed of needles and scattered pine cones litter the forest floor ... quite the contrast if you recall the lush undergrowth in the fir and cedar woodlands on the Cascades' more humid western slopes.

For over six miles Highway 12 parallels **Rimrock Lake**, a popular recreation area which takes its name from the flat-topped rock outcrops on the surrounding peaks. Anglers land Kokanee and Rainbow trout from April through September (fishing is legal year round). There are several small resorts and nearly a dozen Forest Service campgrounds nestle in the pine woods bordering the lake shore. **Tieton Dam**, a 220-foot-high earth-filled structure, impounds the reservoir which provides irrigation water to the thirsty orchards and farmlands of the lower Naches Valley.



Rimrock Lake is a popular recreation area

For twenty miles below the dam Highway 12 follows the Tieton River. This stretch of waterway is popular with whitewater rafting enthusiasts, especially in late spring when the river runs high and swift. The climate becomes increasingly arid as we travel east. Pines now grow only in scattered stands. Lava outcrops mark the hillsides and bare rock slopes and cliffs dominate the heights. In the canyons, hugging the watercourses, dense groves of black cottonwood mingle with occasional thickets of white-barked quaking aspen. White oak scatters the hillsides. Sagebrush soon forms the dominant groundcover with the odd patch of prickly pear cactus. The pine forest ends, save for the isolated pockets growing on cooler north-facing slopes. Outcrops of columnar basalt attest to ancient volcanism

The **Oak Creek Wildlife Area** sprawls over 64,000 acres of grassy foothills north of the highway. This area contains 28 miles of fishing streams and more than 135 miles of backcountry roads. The area provides habitat for a wide variety of wildlife, including mule deer, elk, California big horn sheep, mountain goats, forest grouse, turkey, quail, chukar and many small mammals. Also present are neo-tropical and upland birds, raptors, reptiles and amphibians.

During winter (usually January-March) the State Fish and Wildlife Department operates an elk feeding station, providing fodder to nurture the local herd of Rocky mountain elk. This also attracts bighorn sheep. The wildlife area headquarters is on US-12 two miles west of White Pass Junction. A small visitor center with a viewing platform is open when the feeding station is operating.

At White Pass Junction our route returns to the Naches Valley. The highway runs through irrigated orchard country. East of Naches the landscape becomes increasingly urban. Just beyond the Naches River Bridge, on cliffs near the river's edge, is an area of **Indian Rock Paintings** (accessible via Old Naches Road from the west or Powerhouse Road from the east).

Skirting the northern environs of Yakima, US-12 joins Interstate 82 where the Naches empties into the Yakima River at the base of Selah Gap. This marks the end of our auto tour.

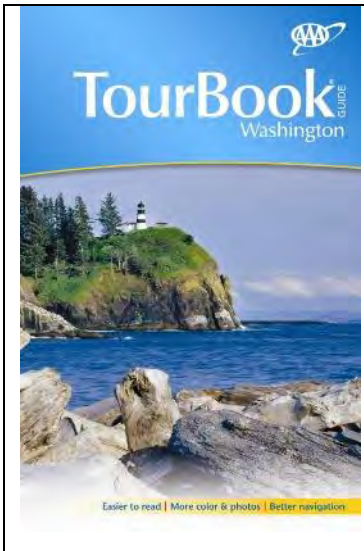
Note: As of July 2011, a **Washington Discover Pass** is required for admission to day-use areas of state parks, as well as areas administered by the state Department of Fish & Wildlife and the Department of Natural Resources.

The fee is \$10 per 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. Discover Passes can also be purchased as part of vehicle license renewals.

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.





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Photos by Tony Mayer unless otherwise indicated, Map drawn by John King

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