

A Visit to Northwest Trek Wildlife Park A Drive on the 'Wild Side'

By Tracy Beard

Need a change of scenery? Consider basking in a day of outdoor adventure at Northwest Trek Wildlife Park in Eatonville, Wash. (southeast of Olympia). There, you can spend the afternoon walking along shady paths while spying into the homes of ferocious grizzly bears, stealthy wild cats



and eagle-eye birds of prey. Or join one of the Wild Drives and drive your own car through open wild habitats while following a radio-guided tour, keeping a sharp eye out for the antlers of resident moose, elk, deer and caribou.

The Park opened in 1975 with a focus on conservation, education and recreation. Accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums, the park enforces excellent standards of care for its assortment of native Northwest wildlife while continuing to maintain and research the animals' natural habitats.

Many animals roam freely through the various terrains located inside the 435-acre fenced section of the park. The tall evergreen forest provides shade and protection from the elements for the deer, moose, elk and other beasts. The lake offers the perfect dwelling for frogs, insects and birds. Local eagles are often spotted snatching fish from the lake for dinner. The meadows make spectacular playgrounds. Deer and bison lazily graze in the sunshine, bull elk spar for the attention of the ladies, and bighorn sheep meander throughout the fields.



Vancouver, Wash. resident Tracy Beard writes about luxury and adventure travel, traditional and trendy fine dining and libations for regional, national and international magazines and is a regular "Out & About" contributor to CRR.

Before Covid-19, trams maneuvered guests through the wild terrain. In order to open again and to stay compliant with the new social distancing guidelines, the park devised a new touring system whereby people drive their cars in small groups with a private tour guide in the lead.

I began my visit at 9am on a weekday. My daughter Brittney drove our car while we listened to our tour guide on the radio. I took photos during the Wild Drive as we traversed and observed the three primary habitats located within the park: the lake, the forest and the meadows. We listened to a designated radio channel where the guide continually gave us a description of the area and an education regarding the different species



found along the way. She also gave us a heads-up when she spotted the different types of animals. Our guide instructed us to "look for movement, the flick of an ear or the twitch of a tail." She suggested we search for animals taking shelter at the base of trees and listen carefully with our windows down. Inside the forest, the cedar canopy is one of nature's umbrellas. The big boughs provide cover for many different creatures. Four moose, one male bull and three female cows dwell in the park. One of the first animals we saw was the colossal bull moose. The North American moose has a short neck, long legs and shovel-shaped antlers with pointed ends. These antlers are shed each year and can weigh up to 66 pounds. The bull moose is the largest member of the deer family, and his massive antlers are used during mating rituals and for defense.

Brittney and I spotted numerous Roosevelt elk with their pale yellow rumps. The males weigh up to 1100 pounds and the females up to 625 pounds. These elk are extraordinarily vocal, and during the breeding season they make loud squeals, grunts and whistling noises. The elk, named after President Theodore Roosevelt, were in severe decline at the time. President Roosevelt created a conservation area in what was then known as



the Mt. Olympus National Monument in Washington State. The conservation area protected the elk population, and now they have reached a "secured" status. According to our guide, "When you give animals the ability to find food, water and space to raise their young, they will flourish."

Another animal found in the park that was once on the verge of extinction is the bighorn sheep. These agile creatures have square-shaped hooves and short, sturdy legs. The pads of their feet are spongy and act like suction cups giving them incredible traction on the edges of mountain cliffs. The sheep's fur is rich in lanolin, making it waxy and helping to protect the sheep from the elements. These sheep are native to the east side of the Cascade mountain range, where they flourish, savoring the salt and mineral deposits found in the mountains.

Before the Civil War in America, millions of bison wandered the plains. In the late 19th century the bison had been hunted almost to the point of extinction. When private citizens in the United States and Canada realized the low numbers of bison on the continent, they began conservation efforts. Our guide said, "Never underestimate your ability to make a difference for wildlife."

Today the bison have been brought back from the brink of extinction, with more than 500,000 in North America. Many thrive in commercial and conservation herds, but for the best views of wild bison, visit Yellowstone National Park. Bison are the largest mammals walking the earth and can weight up to 2,000 pounds.

Numerous other animals and birds flourish at Northwest Trek. Barn swallows perform aerial acrobatics in search of bugs to eat, and a pair of trumpeter swans bathe in the waters of Pothole Lake. Both



swans sustained injuries and can no longer fly, but over the years more than 40 signets have been born and released into the Pacific Northwest and Midwest areas to repopulate. Trumpeter swans were nearing extinction because they were hunted for their highly coveted long white feathers used as quill pens and fashionable accents in hats.

Our Wild Drive took approximately one hour, and afterward we headed over to the main entrance. North

West Trek Park collaborates with its sister zoo, Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium in Tacoma. Currently, entrance tickets for both the Wild Drive and the Wild Walk must be purchased online with a designated time for entry. Once inside the park, guests can purchase items from the open-air gift shop or meander down the one-way trail to view the various exhibit areas. This part of Northwest Trek features two orphaned grizzly bears and two black bears.

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The park is also home to cougars, Canadian lynxes and bobcats, all members of the cat family. The canine members include white wolves and red foxes. Feathered friends make a good showing as exceptional members of this Wild Walk; and on most days, the bald and golden eagle and the barn and snowy owls can be spotted in their habitats. Walking along, guests will also view the local porcupines, badgers, river otters, raccoons and wolverines.

Northwest Trek Wildlife Park is perfect for the whole family. Leave the confines of your home and venture outside for a fun-filled day in the Pacific Northwest.

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IF YOU GO

Northwest Trek Wildlife Park
11610 Trek Dr E, Eatonville, Wash.
90 miles from Longview via I-5 N
and US-12 E

Open daily, 9:30 am - 4:30 pm
Hours may change due to virus

Admission:
Wild Walk: \$12 ages 13+; \$10, 3-12.
Wild Drive: \$80 per vehicle (up to
8 occupants)
Buy tickets online at nwtrek.org
(360) 832-6117



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PROVISIONS

ALONG THE TRAIL

Lemon Raviolis with Sage

I learned how to make this recipe from my Italian friend, Erik Lobina from Milan, Italy.

1 pound fresh lemon ricotta ravioli (Trader Joes carries them; if you cannot find them, use plain ricotta ravioli and add the zest of 1 lemon to the recipe.)

3 Tbl extra virgin olive oil
1-½ Tbl minced garlic
4 Tbl kosher or sea salt
15 cherry tomatoes – cut in half
30 fresh sage leaves
4 ounces butter
Grated parmesan cheese

Fill a large pot ¾ of the way with water. Add salt and bring to a boil. Place olive oil and garlic in a large saucepan or wok. Cook on low for three minutes and do not



brown. Squeeze the cherry tomatoes over the pan. Cook for five minutes and add whole sage leaves. Cook until tomatoes and sage are soft.

Add ravioli to boiling water and cook according to package directions. Do not overcook. Add ½ cup of pasta water to the sauce in the pan. Add butter to the sauce. Use a spider or slotted spoon and place ravioli into the sauce. Let the sauce thicken. Stir gently once or twice. Sprinkle a generous amount of parmesan on the plate in a circle. Place 5-9 ravioli on the cheese, add some tomatoes, sage and pan sauce. Serve al dente.