

RIDGEFIELD NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE Not just for birds!

Story and photos by Tracy Beard

In today's crazy world, people are always looking for peace and tranquility. Many find this quiet space by spending time in prayer, practicing yoga or walking in the great outdoors. If you are one of those who finds serenity in nature, take a trip to Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge, where you can listen to the leaves flutter in the wind, watch the squirrels scurry up the trees and breathe the fresh air while you stroll along well-maintained trails.



Meet the Original Visitors and Residents

The Refuge is located on a section of the Columbia River wetlands in Ridgefield, Washington. More than 200 years ago this spot made an ideal campsite for Lewis and Clark. In 1805 and 1806 the expedition camped along these shores and spent time with one of the largest Chinook tribal villages made



up of more than 900 residents living in 14 longhouses. The explorers and the tribal community shared the space with an abundance of birds.

Learn About the Replica



Excavators from Portland State University discovered the remains of a former longhouse and uncovered the 37 x 78-foot dimensions of the previous building. With guidance from the *cont page 11*

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archeological remains, euro-American journals and oral tribal histories, a group of more than 100 volunteers spent 3,500 hours over a two-year span building the replica of this longhouse. The crew used 246 red cedar logs and a photograph from 1840 that revealed images of the carved and painted woodwork that once decorated the interior. The project reconstruction cost \$575,000.

Explore the Trails

Follow the trail along the right side of the longhouse to go around Duck Lake. You may wish to bring your muck boots as the area can be quite wet. If you continue right at all the junctions, you will eventually come to a view of Boot Lake.



The easy walking trails meander throughout the sanctuary, numerous animals find shelter in the woods and along the lakes, and a tremendous number of birds still make this section of the wetlands their home.

While I made my way around the refuge, I ran into a few workers with the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC). Aidan, the YCC supervisor, and Kalyn, a high school student (pictured, above left), were among those in



the work party. Over this last summer, high-schoolers and their supervisors spent several weeks restoring the trails and maintaining the area.

The trails in this section of the protected haven offer grassy open meadows, Nootka roses, snowberry bushes and enormous white oaks. Many of the trees have identification labels at their base.

Another easy loop trail lies south. Drive back to Ridgefield, turn left on Pioneer Street for 0.4 miles, turn right on 9th Avenue for 0.6 miles, and turn right onto the refuge's 4.2-mile tour drive by car. Hiking in this area is seasonal and allowed from May 1 to September 30. The road closes at 9:00 p.m. each night.

Drive or hike this section and gaze upon the tall grass and stinging needles, or hide behind one of the many bird blinds that are scattered throughout the area and see if you can spy on any of the unsuspecting wildlife. Enjoy a walk on the boardwalk section of Kiwa Trail that extends across a marshy lake.

The seasonal plant life, semi-permanent and permanent wetland, grassland and trees make the refuge an ideal environment for migrating birds and waterfowl that stick around for winter. Every year the sandhill crane migrates to this shelter and a party ensues.

Party With the Birds ~ Birdfest and Bluegrass! Oct 5 Weekend

The Friends of the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge host a celebration of the fall migration of the sandhill crane at the BirdFest and Bluegrass Festival. Thousands of people come each year to learn about the history of the area and to see wildlife. The 20th anniversary of this event is on the weekend of October 5, 2019.

The festivities will begin on Friday, October 4, with two sandhill crane tours and a celebration at the Ilani Casino & Resort featuring food, drinks and a silent auction. Saturday's schedule includes a variety of activities including bluegrass music, hikes, bird-language workshops and opportunities for canoeing and kayaking if you book early. For more information, go to <http://ridgefieldfriends.org/birdfest-bluegrass/>.

Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge is one of over 540 in the National Wildlife Refuge System, and it is the perfect place to find serenity. These havens were established to protect our nation's natural and cultural resources for generations to come.

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IF YOU GO

Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge

Driving directions: Take I-5 Exit 14 and head west on Pioneer Street. Turn right at the flashing light on Main Avenue; after a mile, turn left and drive down to the parking lot. This section is open year-round; entry fee \$3. Drop your payment in the box by the large sign. Read about the plant and wildlife before crossing the footbridge over the railroad tracks. Once you are on the other side of the footbridge, walk a short 0.2 miles and look to your left. The original 14 cedar-plank longhouses have rotted away, but a replica of one stands next to Duck Lake. The building was constructed in 2005 to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Lewis and Clark's layover.

Note: Pets and bicycles are not allowed inside the 5,218-acre refuge.



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PROVISIONS

ALONG THE TRAIL

Chipotle-Honey-Glazed Chicken

4 chicken thighs – washed and trimmed of excess fat

- ½ cup honey
- 1 Tbl. pureed chipotle chilis in adobo
- 2 Tbl. ablespoons ancho chili powder
- 1 Tbl. Dijon mustard
- ½ tsp Kosher salt
- ¼ tsp ground black pepper
- 2 Tbl. olive oil
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp paprika
- ½ Tbl. sesame seeds
- 1 tsp chopped chives or green onions
- Non-stick spray

Heat your grill to medium.

Whisk together the honey, chipotle puree, Dijon mustard, ½ tablespoon of the ancho powder, salt, pepper, 1 tablespoon of the olive oil and set aside.

Stir together 1½ Tbl. ancho powder, cumin and paprika in a small bowl. Thoroughly coat chicken thighs with the dry spice mix. Spray the top and bottom grill racks with non-stick spray. Place spiced chicken skin side down on the grill. Once you have grill marks, turn the chicken over. Once you have grill marks again, place the chicken skin side down on the top rack so flames do not touch thighs. Cook with top closed until juices run clear.

Place cooked thighs in the bowl with honey-glaze. Toss until well coated, sprinkle with sesame seeds, chives and then serve.

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