

# NEW PERSPECTIVES

## A hike at Seaquest State Park through trekking guide's eyes

By Tracy Beard

Each of us sees the world from a unique perspective. Occasionally it is fun, inspiring and educational to view things through someone else's eyes. This helps give us a new understanding of the universe and to see things we might have missed through our singular angle. I asked my friend, trekking guide Denise Bardal, to take me out into the woods on a hike and guide me along as if I were a guest on one of her treks. For our adventure, Denise took me to Seaquest State Park, located at 3030 Spirit Lake Highway, east of Castle Rock, Washington (Note: at press time State Parks had been closed due to Coronavirur-related social distancing guidelines).

Before getting out of the car, she hung her Discovery Pass on the rear view mirror. This pass is required for parking at the park. Seaquest is a fantastic place to hike. It aligned perfectly with the next goal in my road to recovery from a previous injury to my feet. My neighborhood strolls had made me stronger, and now it was time to don my hiking boots and see how I would do in the mud, rain and elements of the Pacific Northwest.

Before heading down the trail, Denise shared with me the safety precautions they teach when trekking with clients, warning about any potential animal hazards, any dangerous or strenuous parts of the terrain and expected elevation changes throughout the hike.

As we made our way down the trail, Denise pointed out the many Douglas-firs in this part of the forest. These tall evergreens have thick bark, dark wood and saggy cones. They are part of the pine family. I am very familiar with this type of tree, as our family typically cuts one down each year for Christmas. Mixed amongst the Douglas firs, we spotted the *Alnus rhombifolia*, or white alder tree. This tree is native to western North America and is deciduous, meaning it drops its leaves each year. The bark is a pale gray or almost white. When the tree is young, the bark is smooth; but as it ages, it takes on a scaly appearance.

We found only a few western red cedars. These stunning trees boast needles that form spray-like branches. They produce small cones, and I think the needles have one of the best scents in the forest.

Another fun tree is the western hemlock. We spied a few that reached high above the Douglas firs. You can recognize them by their droopy top. The flat needles have rounded tips and two white lines underneath. The cones are small, under one inch long, and the bark has a reddish color inside. Throughout our hike, we found only one maple tree. We meandered through



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## A Walk in the Woods



Scenes around Seaquest State Park. Lower right: Denise Bardal, who with Jeff Fiskar of *Wa Llamas* ([www.wallamas.com](http://www.wallamas.com)), takes hikers on packing trips in the Washington wilderness, using llamas to pack all the gear.

a section of forest and discovered it when we spotted the leaves covering some of the lower bushes.

The Pacific Northwest is home to several different types of lichen. According to the USDA Forest Service, "A lichen is the combination of two organisms, a fungus and an alga or cyanobacterium (or both in some instances) that function as a single stable unit." There are about 17,000 species in the world. These lichens enable algae to live all over the world and to convert carbon dioxide into oxygen. We found lichen dangling from the trees throughout the forest, but Denise was excited to show me one particular area on this trail, where a unique type of lichen known as Methuselah's Beard or Old Man's Beard (*Usnea longissimi* Ach) enveloped the trees. This rare type of lichen can reach 20 feet long. It is found in open and shaded forests typically located by water. It grows in the crowns, or tops, of coniferous, cone-bearing seed plants or trees. According to the



USDA Plants Database, "Its habitat is shrinking and instead of establishing itself via spores, parts of it break off and reestablish themselves elsewhere."

As we meandered through the woods, Denise shared how some people love the architecture of buildings, but that she loves the architecture, bark and structure of the different trees in the forest.

Seaquest State Park boasts a variety of plants and wildlife. Sword ferns and Oregon grape carpet the forest floor. The berry on the Oregon grape is edible and tart in flavor. The root and root

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stems are used to make medicine for several stomach and intestinal ailments. Although most adults are familiar with these plants, Denise enjoys pointing them out to the Boy Scouts who join them on treks. We found some salal, an evergreen plant with fuzzy white or pink bell-shaped flowers. The flowers then become a purple berry. The salal was a staple for the Native Americans and was written about in the Lewis and Clark Expedition journals. Salal berries are safe to eat and can be used to make jams, jellies, compotes and fruit leathers.

Although it is always nice to hike on a dry sunny day, mud reveals a great deal about what lives in the forest. During our trek, we found several excellent deer and raccoon tracks.

Seaquest State Park offers hikers 505 acres of land to wander near Silver Lake. Trails weave back and forth throughout the property and around the exterior. After hiking the trails, check out the Mount St. Helens Visitors Center across the road from the park.

Denise and I traversed approximately 2.25 miles at Seaquest. I received an excellent education in the local wildlife, trees and plants of the area. The next time you head out into nature, bring along someone with knowledge about things that are unfamiliar to you and get a new perspective of the region.

And don't forget food! Before heading out, pack a snack...perhaps try my recipe for Poached Eggs and Asparagus and Tapenade Toast (*below*).

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### Poached Eggs with Asparagus and Tapenade Toast

4 large eggs  
1 Tbl white or apple cider vinegar  
Salt and pepper  
1 French baguette  
2 Tbl olive oil  
1 lb asparagus spears,  
cleaned and trimmed

#### Dressing

1Tbl orange zest  
3 Tbl fresh-squeezed orange juice  
2 Tbl olive oil  
4 tsp white vinegar

Whisk together orange juice, 2 tablespoons olive oil, white vinegar, orange zest, and salt and pepper to taste. Set aside.

#### Tapenade

1/2 cup kalamata olives, pitted  
1/2 cup picholine olives, pitted  
1/2 Tbl sun-dried tomatoes  
(preserved in oil)  
1 tsp capers  
1/2 clove garlic  
1/4 tsp anchovy paste  
1 tsp chopped fresh basil  
1 tsp chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley  
1 tsp chopped fresh oregano  
1 tsp fresh thyme  
2 Tbl olive oil

## RECIPE

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## PROVISIONS

### ALONG THE TRAIL



Place all ingredients in a food processor and process until chopped and well blended. Set aside.

Drizzle asparagus with olive oil and salt and pepper. Grill on BBQ or on a grill pan on the stove until crisp-tender. Drizzle sliced baguette with olive oil and grill on both sides.

Poach eggs in 4 cups of gently boiling water mixed with one tablespoon vinegar for 3–5 minutes until preferred doneness.

Place one or two tablespoons of tapenade on each grilled slice of bread. Place cooked asparagus on the plate alongside toast and top toast or asparagus with the poached eggs. Drizzle everything with dressing.

*Ads removed for  
Archival purposes*