

The Big Gay Gorge

The great outdoors in your back yard
by West Duncan

JUST OUT TRAVEL

As the cost of gas rises with the thermometer, the summer is an excellent time to discover your own back yard.

Closer than some may imagine, the Columbia River Gorge offers rich views and opportunities at a fraction of the cost that you may have spent on a road trip.

reasons to play. Price hopes more Portlanders come to appreciate the breathtaking views this coveted yet convenient spot has to offer.

Whether you're a professional windsurfer or a first-time camper, the following list of fun-filled gorge activities will suit even the least butch among your bunch. Complete with exit numbers from Interstate 84, descriptions and experience level, this guide should save you gas, time and stiff muscles. Even if your idea of camping includes a hairdryer and HBO, Price says, "There's something here for everybody."

Rooster Rock (Exit 25)

Experience Level: none except comfort with nudity
Length: .25 to 1 mile, depending on the water level
Time: 15 to 30 minutes

With one of the best beaches and views along the Columbia River, Rooster Rock is not known for its southern exposure as much as its total exposure. The "clothing optional" beach's

Flood—3,000-year-old ice dams in present-day Montana, melting and ripping out the Columbia 15,000 years ago.

Or keep your clothes on at the west end of the park. The park offers a challenging disk-golf course and a variety of views from picnic areas and shelters, trails throughout and river access for boaters and windsurfers.

Wahkeena Trail and Falls (Exit 28)

Experience Level: moderate to difficult
Length: 4.8 miles through the trail, 6.4 miles to the waterfalls

Time: 4 to 5 hours, depending on experience

Nestled quietly on the Columbia River Historic Highway, one of the most visually dense roads in the gorge, this hike promises a lot—and delivers. Summer-blooming wildflowers and wild game are out and about in this remote location. Some parts of the hike are strenuous but worth the workout. The morning hours give visitors a more solitary opportunity to take in flora and fauna.

The Vista House (Exit 22)

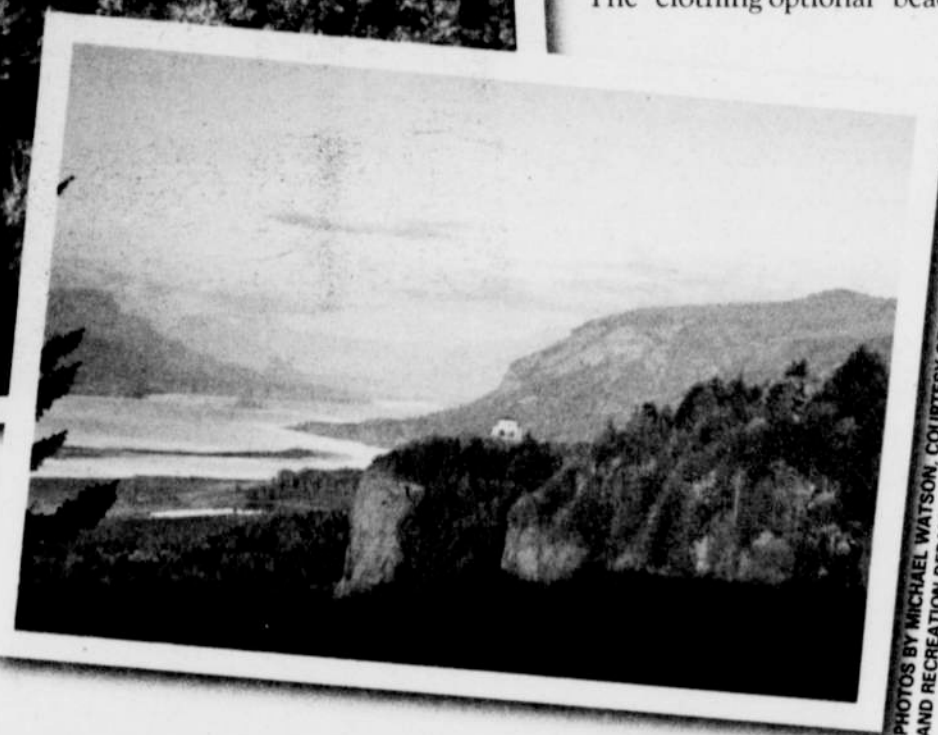
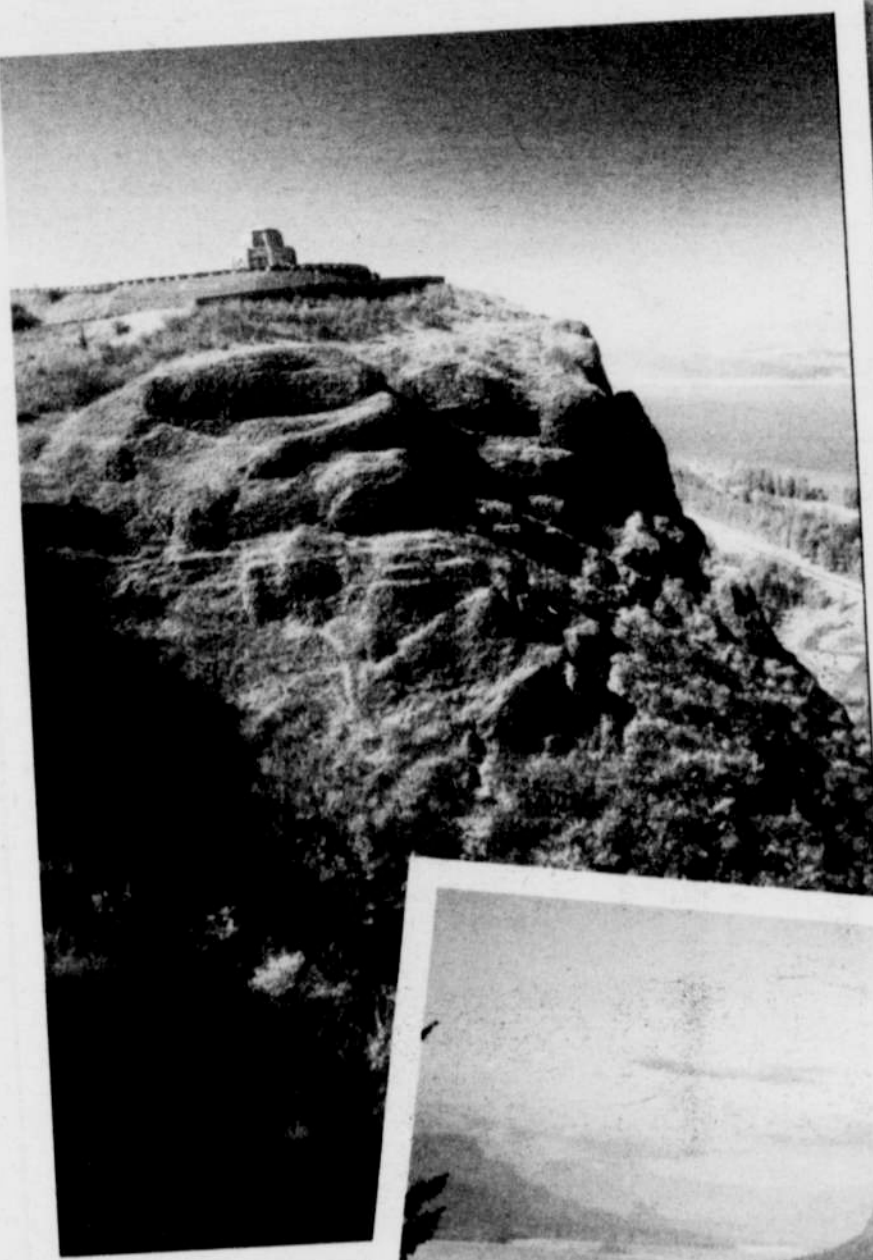
Experience Level: none
Length: a beautiful 10-minute drive off I-84 on the Historic Highway

Aptly called the "million-dollar rest stop," the Vista House is the best place in the gorge for a pit stop.

Built in 1918, the fancy wayside cost \$100,000 to build—and was restored to the tune of \$1.4 million. This may sound opulent for such a stark spot, but this prime location on Crown Point is a tribute to the Historic Highway's engineer, Samuel Lancaster. Even the parks department's Price, who beholds views from the Vista House daily, insists it's his very favorite place on the river.

Be sure to bring a camera for this gem. On a clear day, views of Mount St. Helens, Mount Hood and miles of the Columbia River, with its jagged striations and mammoth landscape, are visible and breathtakingly photogenic. **10**

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PHOTOS BY MICHAEL WATSON, COURTESY OF OREGON PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT

Kevin W. Price, assistant area manager for the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, has seen 25 years of change in state parks but nothing quite as dramatic as the gorge itself. Inhabiting 97,000 acres, 500 miles of hiking trails and countless ways of enjoying them, the state parks in the gorge offer plenty of ways and

eastend is as far as you need to venture for a European experience. Also exposed is the view of the gorge as it bends through gaping walls made by the Brentz

THE GORGE TRAVEL TIPS

When visiting the Columbia River Gorge, be sure to read and follow all the park regulations to ensure that you and others can enjoy this scenic wonder for years to come.

Haven't camped before and want to learn more? Check out the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department's "Let's Go Camping!" program, which offers classes in the basic skills of camping. Visit www.oprd.or.gov for more information.

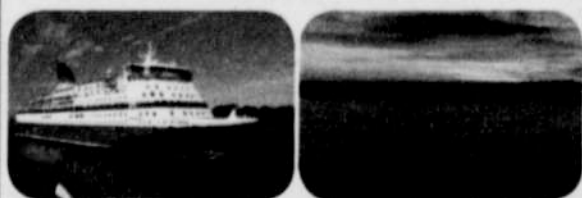
Also, take heed in the Boy Scouts' motto and be prepared. Remember:

- Food and water. There's not much around unless you want to fish for it.
- Trash bags. You packed it in, so make sure to pack it out and leave no trace. The fine is \$500 for tossing out flaming objects such as charcoal, cigarette butts and matches.
- Leashes. Check ahead of time to make sure your destinations allow pets!
- \$3 for your day-use fee.
- Sunscreen. Sunscreen. Sunscreen.

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