

# Washington walks for a balmy winter weekend

By **BRIAN J. CANTWELL**  
*The Seattle Times*

SEATTLE — Folks in snow-buried Boston may have taken to heart Punxsutawney Phil’s Groundhog Day prediction of six more weeks of winter. In the Pacific Northwest? We say “groundhog, shmoundhog.”

It’s hard to believe it’s not spring outside. With only 5 percent of the usual snowpack in the Olympic Mountains this winter, along with light snowpack almost everywhere else, it’s tempting to head for the hills.

If you’re equipped and experienced for it, go. Enjoy. But if a walk in the park is more your speed, don’t be fooled — it’s still winter up there. Many people bagged the peak of Mount Pilchuck last weekend — a rare experience in February — but it was still icy and snowy up top, and some climbers wore sneakers. If you’re caught unprepared, the nights are very long and very cold.

But you can find early-season surprises without going high:

- Garden walks**
- Washington Park Arboretum: The Witt Winter Garden has its expected witch hazel and camellias in bloom among the Arboretum’s 230 acres edging Lake Washington just east of the Montlake District.
  - “But we also have early buds of azalea and rhododendrons, and some hellebores that are early,” says facilities coordinator Bryan Pilkington. “And I also had a report of buds on the flowering cherries. Of course, we’re all really worried about what happens when winter comes back and these things are caught out.” (Go soon.)
  - 2300 Arboretum Drive E., Seattle. Free; depts. [washington.edu/uwb/gardens/wpa.shtml](http://washington.edu/uwb/gardens/wpa.shtml)
  - Bellevue Botanical Garden: Roam through 53 acres of cultivated garden, restored woodlands and natural wetlands and look for early buds and uncurling ferns in this pocket of unexpected nature just east of bustling downtown Bellevue.
  - Don’t miss the Ravine Experience, a 1/3-mile nature trail crossing a deep ravine via a 150-foot suspension bridge. Plenty of spring birds here, too; bring your field guide. 12001 Main St., Bellevue. Free; [bellevuebotanical.org](http://bellevuebotanical.org)
  - Kruckeberg Botanic Garden: Look for early blooms (wild currant coming on quickly) while you pick out native North-



AP Photo / The Seattle Times, Mike Siegel  
**In this 2007 photo visitors check out the middle falls at Wallace Falls State Park, near Gold Bar, Wash. A 2.9-mile trail passes nine falls on the Wallace River.**



AP Photo/The Seattle Times, Steve Ringman  
**This 2012 photo shows hamamelis mollis, commonly called Chinese witch hazel, at the Washington Park Arboretum in the Witt Winter Garden in Seattle.**

west plants for your garden (many plants are for sale) at this shaded and woody four-acre reserve in Shoreline. Now a city park, it’s the collection of retired University of Washington botany professor Arthur Kruckeberg and his late wife, Maureen, botanists and horticulturists who spent more than 50 years adding to the gardens surrounding their home. 20312 15th Ave. N.W., Shoreline. Free; [kruckeberg.org](http://kruckeberg.org)

**Waterfall hikes**

High freezing levels means early snowmelt, and that furiously fuels waterfalls all around us.

- Wallace Falls: At the heart of a 4,735-acre state park near Gold Bar, this is one of the Puget Sound region’s waterfall medalists, with an excellent trail to get you there.

The most visible is an impressive 265-foot waterfall, but the 2.9-mile (one-way) Woody Trail takes

you past a total of nine falls as the Wallace River drops 800 feet in less than a half-mile. The hike takes you through old-growth coniferous forests, and if you stop at the Lower and Middle Falls viewpoints (making for a shorter outing), the elevation gain isn’t prohibitive for the Sunday hiker. 14503 Wallace Falls Road, Gold Bar. Discover Pass required. [parks.wa.gov/289/Wallace-Falls](http://parks.wa.gov/289/Wallace-Falls).

- Murhut Falls: It was Washington Trails Association’s Hike of the Week last week because it’s an easy, relatively unknown hike to a pretty Olympic Peninsula falls. The nearby Duckabush River was flooding homes near Brinnon two weeks ago, so the gush factor in the area likely remains high.

The destination is a 130-foot plunging waterfall reached in just under a mile, with a climb of only 250 feet to reach the tiered falls at 1,050-foot elevation. Take grandma and the kids; just hold small or infirm hands during the final stretch of trail with a drop-off on one side. As warm weather progresses, watch for pink-flowering wild rhodies.

No pass required.

- Franklin Falls: Snuggled up beneath the Interstate 90 freeway just a slushball’s-throw west of Snoqualmie Pass, this hike is usually a snowshoe trip this time of year. Not this February. It’s pretty much snow-free, and after several consecutive years of trail work (thank you, WTA volunteers), the trail is in very good condition, safe for young and old.

This is the southern fork of the Snoqualmie River, falling about 135 feet in three tiers, though only the final 70-foot cataract can be seen from the trail. Alpentail’s melting-snow loss is the waterfall-lover’s gain. It’s just two miles, round-trip, with 400 feet of upward climb. Northwest Forest Pass required.

**A daffodil drive**

The Skagit Valley is known for trumpeter swans that visit in winter, and you’ll likely see hundreds in area farm fields. Get a bliss fix when the big white birds stretch their long necks and wings to fly over you while serenading Mount Baker with their signature haunting honk.

And there’s a February bonus this year: the start of blooming daffodil fields. Car stop, photo op.

The sun was coaxing the first flowers to open when I drove through last week.

For the bloom map, see [tulips.com/bloommap](http://tulips.com/bloommap).



AP Photo/National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Candice Emmons  
**In this Feb. 25 photo provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration a new baby orca swims alongside an adult whale, believed to be its mother, about 15 miles off the coast of Westport, Wash.**

## Feds spot third new baby orca born to imperiled pods

By **PHUONG LE**  
*Associated Press*

SEATTLE — U.S. scientists following endangered killer whales from a research vessel have spotted a baby orca off the coast of Washington state, the third birth documented this winter but still leaving the population dangerously low.

The research crew observed the calf on Wednesday with other whales in the L-pod, one of three families of southern resident killer whales that frequent inland Washington waters, said Brad Hanson, a biologist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries.

The baby looks great and was very active when it was seen about 15 miles west of Westport, Washington, Hanson said in a telephone interview Thursday while NOAA’s research vessel, Bell Shimada, was briefly at port.

It’s the third baby born to the whale pods in recent months and is an encouraging sign for the Puget Sound endangered population, though their numbers remain low at 80. The whales are struggling because of pollution, lack of food and other reasons.

The births are great news, but there also has not been a successful birth in the population for more than two years, said Ken Balcomb, senior scientist at the Center for Whale Research that keeps a census of the orcas.

“We know they’ve been having babies, they just haven’t survived,” Balcomb said. “We’re getting more year-round observations, but the proof of the census is who’s alive by July 1. If they’re still here in July, we can celebrate.”

The population lost four whales last year, including a pregnant orca, a baby whale and two others that went miss-

ing and were presumed dead.

It’s too early to say how things are going to go for this calf, Hanson said.

Wednesday’s sighting was also the first time a baby orca was spotted on the outer coast. Its mother appears to be a whale known as L-94, but it’s not clear yet how old the calf is, Hanson said.

“We realize the population is having a reproduction success problem, and trying to understand what animal is or isn’t successful is helpful,” Hanson said.

Often, a whale that gives birth in the ocean may not return to the inland waters with that baby. In the past, “if this calf didn’t survive, we may not know,” he said.

Until recently, scientists didn’t know where the orcas swam in the winter or what they ate. But a satellite tracking project and other research are helping fill in the gaps.

Hanson and others aboard the NOAA research ship have been at sea for two weeks and have been collecting fecal samples and even catching scales from the whale’s fish kills to study what it eats.

This winter, the team tagged two whales and then tracked their movements. They first tagged a member of the J-pod and monitored that group for about six weeks as the animals mostly stuck to the Salish Sea, the inland waters shared by Washington state and Canada.

Earlier this month, while on the research vessel, the crew tagged a member of L-pod. The ship followed the L-pod and another group, the K-pod, as the whales swam along the Washington coast, as far south as central Oregon.

The research will help inform decisions about whether to protect more habitat for the animals, including in waters off the West Coast.

### BRIEFLY

**State might buy Deschutes ranch**

BEND (AP) — The state Department of Fish and Wildlife might buy a 10,000-acre piece of a ranch along the Lower Deschutes River.

*The Bend Bulletin* reports the Limmeroth family owns the land that had been used for grazing and dryland wheat farming.

The family has already sold off other portions of the ranch, and has been working with the nonprofit Trust for Public Land to facilitate the deal with the state.

If the purchase goes through, the land would become part of the Lower Deschutes Wildlife Area, about 8,500 acres mostly on the east side of the river.

Jeremy Thompson is a district wildlife biologist for Fish and Wildlife in The Dalles. He says the ranch property, on the west side of the river, would be managed

as a wildlife area for deer and elk as well as salmon and steelhead.

**Cougar reported in Baker City**

BAKER CITY (AP) — Baker City police say tracking dogs had no luck finding a cougar that two people reported seeing Wednesday afternoon.

Police Chief Wyn Lohner says the witnesses saw the animal cross a highway before running up a hill toward a neighborhood in the southwest part of the city.

Baker City police and others searched that area as well as nearby golf course.

Lohner told the *Baker City Herald* that a pair of tracking dogs owned by Joe Curtis spent about an hour searching the area Wednesday night.

The dogs will be available for a couple more days if there are additional sightings.

## Oregon canal recommended for National Register

BEND (AP) — A segment of the Pilot Butte Canal has been recommended for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, a move that could affect a proposed piping project.

The State Advisory Committee on Historic Preservation nominated more than a mile of the canal northeast of Bend. The nomination includes 17 acres of surrounding land that would become a historic district if the National Park Service supports the listing.

Neighbors and property owners want the designation to preserve the waterway and surrounding area for a potential trail system extension, *The Bulletin* newspaper reported. The group has also questioned the need for piping the same section of canal, which has been proposed by the Central Oregon Irrigation District.

The district already pipes part of the canal downstream leading to a hydropower plant at Juniper Ridge. The new section of proposed piping would connect with the other.

A listing to the register would require Deschutes County and the city of Bend to review any land use applications pertaining to the canal’s “demolition, removal, or major exterior alteration,” according to Oregon law.

The Pilot Butte Canal, completed more than a century ago, runs from

the Deschutes River in Bend to Terbonne near the Crooked River. A historic listing would be based on the significance the canal played in bringing water to allow farming, fostering settlements and the incorporation of Bend and Redmond.

Alexander Drake, one of founders of Bend, named the canal after Pilot Butte, which is now a state park. He founded a company that secured the water rights to divert water from the Deschutes River to ranchers and farmers.

Irrigation district officials have said they agree parts of the canal are historic, but disagree with the process property owners have pursued.

While other newspapers give you less, *The East Oregonian*

**GIVES YOU MORE**

Our new **CAPITAL BUREAU** covers the state for you

From left: Peter Wong, Hillary Borrund, Mateusz Perkowski