**Easy early-season backpacking trips**

This document summarizes some leader brainstorming and experience about some of the best early season easy backpacking trip options around the PNW.

* [**Chelan Lakeshore**](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/chelan-lakeshore-trail) **(best through May).** A sunny and warm backpack in April and May when the Puget Sound is gloomy, this rolling 18 mile trail from Prince Creek to Stehekin delivers constantly changing views of Lake Chelan. It would be strenuous if you want to do it as an overnight, moderate as a two-night trip.

[**From WTA**](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/chelan-lakeshore)**:** Hike along Washington's dramatic fjord-like Lake Chelan, traversing sun-kissed ledges and blossom-bursting hillsides and weaving through cool forested ravines cut by cascading creeks. Stand high above the sparkling waters of America's third-deepest lake, which catches striking reflections of frosted pointy peaks. Feel rushes of wind funnel down the deep lake-cradling gorge. Listen to aspen leaves rustle, a lone loon cry, waves lap against lakeside ledges, and perhaps a rattling warning. Mile per mile, this is the most scenic hike radiating from Stehekin, and it's the only trail that embraces the dramatic shoreline of 50-mile-long Lake Chelan. Hot in summer, the Lakeshore Trail makes a wonderful destination in fall and spring-especially the latter, when a mosaic of wildflowers including chocolate lilies, balsamroot, and death camas splash the shoreline ledges and grassy slopes in an array of brilliant colors. One way from Prince Creek: 17 miles. Elevation gain 2000 ft. Highest point 1700 ft

* [***Goat Lake***](file:///C:\Users\casca\Downloads\A%20moderate,%2010%20mile%20hike%20with%201400%20ft%20in%20elevation%20gain.%20Hike%20uphill%20along%20Elliott%20Creek%20through%20old%20growth%20forest,%20past%20cascades%20and%20McIntosh%20falls%20to%20reach%20a%20large%20alpine%20lake%20with%20views%20of%20Cadet%20Peak)***, Mountain Loop Hwy.*** A moderate, 10 mile round-trip hike or easy overnight backpack with 1400 ft in elevation gain. Hike uphill along Elliott Creek through old growth forest, past cascades and McIntosh falls to reach a large alpine lake with views of Cadet Peak.

[**From WTA**](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/goat-lake)**:** A spectacular backcountry lake-one of the largest in the area - awaits those who walk this way. Once the site of a bustling mining operation, complete with company town and lakeside hotel, Goat Lake boasts plenty of history along with its fine views. Waterfalls too! So grand is Goat that the Washington Department of Transportation chose it to grace its official road maps in the early 1990s. Roundtrip: 10.4 mi. Elev. gain:1400 ft. High point:3161 ft. (Can get crowded early on Friday and Saturday)

* [***N. Fork Sauk River***](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/north-fork-sauk-river)***, Mountain Loop Hwy.*** An 11 mile hike with 1,000 feet of elevation gain though old growth forest along the North Fork Sauk River in the Glacier Peak Wilderness.The first 5.5 miles follow the river valley upstream with many small ups and downs.  At 5.5 miles is Mackinaw Shelter and the turn-around point for day hikers and beginner backpackers.  The forest section does not have much in the way of views, but the forest is lovely with enormous trees dappled with filtered sunlight and moss.

[***From WTA***](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/north-fork-sauk-river)***:*** Some trails go to lakes, some to high viewpoints. This trail is all about the forest, and what a forest it is! Old-growth trees reach for the sky on either side of a brush-free trail, since understory is minimal when big old trees block out the sunlight. Find fantastic mushrooms here in the fall and forest wildflowers in the spring and early summer.

* [**Suiattle River Trail**](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/suiattle-river)**, Mountain Loop Highway.** The Suiattle river trail is a great riparian stroll alongside a powerful glacial river. At 15 miles round trip, it's a long dayhike but a great easy early-season overnight backpack sporting only 1,000 feet of elevation gain.

[***From WTA***](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/suiattle-river-trail)***:*** The trail winds its way above the Suiattle River through old growth forest and some mature forest recovering from an old burn from the 1920’s. The vegetation in the upper Suiattle watershed includes a wonderful mixture of west/east species. …Roughly 6.5 miles in, an impressive log suspension bridge spans Canyon Creek, where there are several nice campsites on both sides of the creek, and pit toilets. At 0.3 miles beyond Canyon Creek, the Suiattle Trail becomes the Pacific Crest Trail. It is worth the 15 minute walk on the PCT south to views of the Suiattle River from the hiker/stock bridge over the River. Further on, the PCT south leads to Mica Lake and Fire Creek Pass in the lap of Glacier Peak, and beyond.

* [**Greenwater Lakes**](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/greenwater-echo-lost-lakes) **(South Cascades):** An easy, 4 mile hike with 500 ft in elevation gain to a moderate or an 11-14 mile hike with 1,500 feet of elevation gain. A walk through old growth forest in a pretty river valley with scenic bridges crossings in the Norse Peak Wilderness. The route is open to horses.

[***From WTA***](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/greenwater-lakes)***:*** Lush old-growth forest; dark, mysterious forest lakes; and a wonderful chance to meet and see wildlife await hikers here. The trail sticks to a deeply forested river valley where it passes a wonderfully clear, cool lake--Greenwater--with good fishing. The route eventually reaches Echo Lake in a long 7 miles, but these miles fly by as you stride through the cool forest. Footsore hikers will love the soft, duff-rich trail tread, and Echo itself is a wonderful place to rest and relax before hiking back down the pretty trail. But for all that, few people visit, perhaps because the trail doesn't offer sweeping panoramas. The distant views may be missing, but the route is remarkably scenic and solitude is a high probability.

* [**Packwood Lake**](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/packwood-lake) **(South Cascades-Goat Rocks area):** Packwood Lake is a moderate, 10 mile round trip hike or easy overnight with 800 ft in elevation gain. To do a loop trip, hike in the trail and out the road. On a clear day the road offers great views of Rainier, Johnson Peak, etc. There are some waterfalls coming down from above (the water crossings on the main trail?) that are just pretty - rocks and moss.

[**From WTA**](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/packwood-lake)**:** Sometimes, even the most gung-ho hiker needs a break-just a gentle walk through the woods, followed by a leisurely swim and a relaxing afternoon alongside a cool lake. Packwood Lake is the perfect place to practice this laid-back trail lifestyle, especially late in the spring and early in the autumn when the hordes of summer hikers have gone home, freeing up the lake's popular campsites and excellent fishing opportunities.

* [**Ingalls Creek**](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/ingalls-creek) **(Teanaway):** Ingalls Creek is a moderate, 11 mile in-and-out day hike or easy overnight with 1,450 ft in elevation gain. The trail goes up the creek past rapids and through forests. A large group might have trouble finding enough camping spots.

[***From WTA***](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/ingalls-creek)***:*** Venture into a deep wilderness valley shadowed by craggy pinnacles of the Stuart Range and the Wenatchee Mountains' broad flank of summits. Located in one of the largest roadless valleys in the Central Cascades, Ingalls Creek drains a vast area of rugged and stunning beauty. Continuously following the wilderness waterway, let rapids and ripples, crashing cascades and swirling eddies mesmerize you along the way. Come in spring and enjoy a trail lined with flowers-paintbrush, lupine, trillium, glacier lilies, and more.

* [**Bean Creek Basin**](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/bean-creek-basin-review/bean-creek-basin) **(Teanaway)** A 5 mile round trip hike or easy late spring ovenight with 2,000 feet of elevation gain into a flower filled basin with views to Earl Peak, Mount Stuart, and Iron Peak. Take trekking poles for help with early season stream crossings. Late May at the earliest! Can [link to the Navaho Pass trail](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/bean-creek-basin-review/bean-basin-navaho-pass) for a more strenuous two-night backpack of 18.5 mi and 3,600 ft of elevation gain connecting to lots of high-country rambling and easy walk-ups to several adjoining peaks with close-in views of Mount Stuart.

[**From WTA**](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/bean-creek)**:** A sub-alpine meadow teeming with wildflowers greets hikers who make their way up the Bean Creek Basin. Beginning along Beverly Creek as it tumbles past the trailhead, the trail then climbs up Bean Creek to the colorful meadow from which it is fed.

* [**Navaho Pass**](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/bean-creek-basin-review/navaho-pass) **(Teanaway):** Navaho Pass is a strenuous, 11 mile in-and-out day hike or moderate overnight with 3,000 ft in elevation gain. The trail follows Stafford Creek before becoming steeper, switchbacking up to the upper meadows beneath Navaho Pass. Can [link to the Bean Creek Basin trail](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/bean-creek-basin-review/bean-basin-navaho-pass) for a more strenuous two-night backpack of 18.5 mi and 3,600 ft of elevation gain connecting to lots of high-country rambling and easy walk-ups to several adjoining peaks with close-in views of Mount Stuart.

[**From WTA**](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/navaho-pass)**:** Navaho Pass is an excellent introduction to the Teanaway area. Rife with wildflowers, fascinating geology, and just enough elevation gain to keep it interesting, this hike has just about everything that the Teanaway is known for.

* [**Ozette Loop - Cape Alava**](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/ozette-triangle)**(Olympic National Park):** A moderate, 9.4 mile loop day hike or easy overnight with just 350 ft in elevation gain. The trail follows the Cape Alava and Sand Point Trails. You'll hike on a boardwalk through ancient forests to and from the ocean, with a walk along an Olympic Coast beach in between. {Leader Note: while there's little elevation gain/loss, the coast adds some wrinkles for beginners: in particular sometimes seaweed-slippery boulders, plus bear canisters needed for racoons, perhaps even bears. And it rains there a lot!}

[**From WTA:**](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/lake-ozette) With sea stacks, sea otters, sea lions, and ocean scenery for as far as you can see, the 9.4-mile Ozette Triangle is one of the finest hikes on the Olympic Coast. Easily accessible and a loop hike, the Triangle (named for the loop's shape) is a perfect introduction to America's wildest coastline south of Alaska. You won't be alone on this section of wilderness beach, however, for Ozette's admirers are legion. But there's plenty of room, and if you venture this way on a winter weekday you might just find yourself alone with the harlequin ducks.

* [**Third Beach**](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/third-beach) **(Olympic National Park):** Third Beach is an easy, 3.6 mile in-and-out day hike or backpack with 280 ft in elevation gain. Start off on an old road trail through forest to the rugged beach and a scenic falls. Spend a second night and hike to Toleak Point and back.

[**From WTA**](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/third-beach)**:** The trail to Third Beach provides plenty of suspense for hikers. It’s a 1.3 mile trek through high trees, sometimes shrouded in fog, giving the forest here a spooky aura. But popping out onto the coast at the log-choked mouth of a creek and seeing the grand Pacific Ocean provides the perfect payoff.

* [**Third Beach to Hoh River**](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/olympic-coast-south-the-wildcatter-coast) **(Olympic National Park):** This is a spectacular section of Washington’s Wild Olympic Coast. 100 Classic Hikes in Washington, 2nd ed. says, Wild forest and wild ocean, woods animals and sea birds, tide pools and a series of wave-carved stacks called the Graveyard of the Giants, the constant thunder of surf. There are several good campsites and places to turn around along the way from the Third Beach trailhead to the Hoh River, from 1.4 miles to 17.5 miles from the trailhead. NOTES:
* This hike can be challenging with rope ladders to ascend and descend headlands, rocky beaches to hike, and creeks to wade.
* The trip needs to be scheduled to take advantage of favorable tides.
* A car shuttle will allow a one-way hike.

[**From WTA**](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/trip-reports/trip_report.2012-05-27.4492576831)**:** No official WTA trail guide but this link describes the route in detail from a trip report.

* [**Hoh River Trail**](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/hoh-river-trail) **(Olympic National Park):** Hoh River Trail is an easy backpack of 10.5 miles with 500 feet of gain. Experience one of the world’s most famous temperate rain forests, where even the air seems green, and one of the world’s quietest places. Highlights of the trip includes river views, rain forests, tremendous trees, likely Roosevelt Elk sightings, and perhaps even a visit to "One Square Inch of Silence."

[**From WTA**](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/hoh-river-elk-lake)**: T**he hike to Elk Lake on the Hoh River trail is a wonderful multi-day hike that shows off the beauty of the Hoh Rainforest. Hike on relatively level ground until the last two miles, which climb to Elk Lake Campground, which is a good place to start a day hike to the glacier.

* [**Dosewallips River**](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/dosewallips-river-abandoned-national-park-road) **(Olympics):** Dosewallips River is a moderate day hike or easy overnight of 11 miles RT with 1,100 feet of gain. This hike parallels the Dosewallips River and showcases the fall foliage. It is an easy hike along the abandonded National Park road that offers many opportunities for photos. For those with extra energy, the nature trail  loop at the camp is a nice addition.

[**From WTA**](http://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/dosewallips-river)**:** Rhododendrons, old growth, and a river that "talks" to you most of the way. The West Fork Dosewallips River spends much of its time on this hike hidden, flowing through a deep narrow canyon. But its constant commotion can continuously be heard through the surrounding primeval forest. At times it bellows, at times it serenades, but it's always a trailside companion. At Big Timber Camp the river swings by, allowing the two of you to become better acquainted. This is a delightful hike on gentle terrain-perfect for introducing neophytes to the splendors of the Olympic backcountry or as an early season warm-up. Amble this way in June and see Washington's state flower, the showy Pacific rhododendron, at its finest.

* [**Enchanted Valley**](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/backpack-the-enchanted-valley-olympic-np) **(Olympic National Park):** Walk an easy 26 miles through towering mossy rainforest along one of the Olympics' grandest rivers, to a deep green valley and meadow camps surrounded by cliffs with cascading waterfalls. Enjoy bears and elk for company in early season. Easy to moderate as a two-night, strenuous as an overnight. Total elevation gain 1800 feet.

[**From WTA**](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/enchanted-valley)**:** Big trees, a narrow canyon, and a little taste of the Enchanted Valley Trail, a 19-mile path deep into the Olympic interior. Explore the same primeval rainforest valley that explorers of the 1890 O'Neil Expedition set out across. Witness a wilderness not unlike the one those intrepid souls experienced. Come here in the heart of winter and find yourself among one of the largest elk herds in America. (can hike 5 miles just to Pony Bridge or one of multiple camps along the trail, or go the full 9.5 miles to the Enchanted Valley)

* [**Lower Lena Lake**](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/lower-lena-lake) **(Olympic National Park):** A moderate, 6 mile round trip day hike or easy overnight with 1,300 ft of elevation gain. The trail goes up through forests above Lena Creek to a secluded lake. This is a beautiful sub-alpine lake formed by a massive rock slide 5,000 years ago. Later in the season continue on as far as Upper Lena for a longer, more challenging outing.
* [**From WTA**](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/lena-lake)**:** An extremely popular backcountry lake surrounded by ancient timber and ringed with designated campsites complete with fire rings-don't expect a wilderness experience on this hike. You'll encounter all walks of life on this wide, well-groomed, and easy-graded trail that delivers the masses to Lena Lake. Those willing to expend a little more energy can push farther into wilder and quieter places. But if you're intent on Lena, expect lots of company unless you visit in the waning days of autumn. The day hike to Lena Lake is one of the most popular in the Olympics. As one of the easiest trails to a backcountry lake, and with developed campsites, it attracts throngs of backpackers, too, especially neophytes. Roundtrip:5.0 mi. Elev. gain:1300 ft. High point:2000 ft

Hearty hikers and backpackers who venture to Upper Lena Lake will leave the crowds behind and experience a little bit of nirvana. Roundtrip:14.0 mi. Elev. gain:3900 ft. High point:4600 ft

* [**Staircase**](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/upper-south-fork-skokomish-river) **(Olympic National Park):** A moderate 8 mile day hike with 1,100 feet of elevation gain in the Olympic National Forest. Enjoy some of the largest trees you are likely to ever see and a river flowing through a box canyon. This is popularly known as Staircase Rapids.

[**From WTA**](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/staircase)**:** Stand in awe watching the swift-moving waters of the North Fork Skokomish River barrel and thunder over a series of cascades. A great hike anytime of year, Staircase Rapids is especially impressive during the spring runoff. Hikers of all ages will be delighted on this easy and captivating hike. The trek to Staircase Rapids is a heck of a lot easier today than it was in 1890 when Lieutenant Joseph O'Neil, accompanied by a group of scientists, led an army expedition here. The O'Neil Party was intent on traversing the Olympic Peninsula. Lacking the wonderful trails that now grace the region, O'Neil and company cut a mule trail up the North Fork Skokomish River to help transport supplies to base camps along the way. Among the many findings that this expedition would report was a realization that this wild area deserved to be protected. Roundtrip:4.0 mi. Elev. gain:150 ft. High point:950 ft

* [**Baker Lake**](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/baker-lake) **(North Cascades):** A moderate backpacking trip of up to 28 miles (or an easy 14 mile point to point overnight) with just 300 ft in elevation gain. Hike along the east shore of Baker Lake, starting from the north or the south. Most of the trail goes through old growth forests with few views of the lake but with some great views of Mount Baker and Mount Shuksan.

[**From WTA**](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/baker-lake)**:** Man-made Baker Lake, with its stump flats, isn't anything spectacular. But that's not the real draw of this trail. The free-flowing Baker River, cascading tributaries, groves of old-growth giants, views of Mounts Baker and Shuksan, and a cool little suspension bridge-those are what will bring you here. And one more thing: this trail can be hiked in any season by just about anyone. Roundtrip:9.0 mi. Elev. gain:500 ft. High point:1000 ft

* [***Park Butte***](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/scott-paul-trail-park-butte) ***(North Cascades):*** A moderate backpack trip of 7.5 miles and 2200 feet, of which about the last 1.5 miles and 500 feet can be done to the lookout with a daypack from the lovely camp.

[***From WTA***](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/park-butte)***:*** Hike to an historic fire lookout and come face-to-face with Koma Kulshan (Mount Baker). Along with unobstructed panoramic views of Mount Baker, the Twin Sisters, and the rest of the North Cascades, the route to Park Butte offers campsites, wildflower-filled alpine meadows, rushing waterfalls, and a stunning variety of mushroom species.

* [**Ross Dam/Big Beaver**](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/ross-dam-big-beaver-creek) **(North Cascades):** This is an excellent early-season, beginners backpack along the lovely west shore of Ross Lake, to the world-famous lower reaches of Big Beaver creek where giant, ancient Western Red Cedar and Douglas-fir trees (some up to 1000 years old) grow among the marshes along the rushing milky green water. Six miles from Ross Dam, just before the bridge over Big Beaver Creek, is the first camping option at Pumpkin Mountain Camp. If weather permits, nice views and a swim in the lake can be had at Big Beaver Landing (boatman’s camp only). Backcountry Permits are required and are available the morning of your hike or up to 1 day prior at the Marblemount Ranger Station and Wilderness Info. Center.

[***From WTA***](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/big-beaver)***: V***isit one of the best old-growth hikes in the North Cascades, with views of a vivid blue lake and jagged, snowy peaks thrown in for good measure.

* [**East Bank Ross Lake**](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/east-bank-trail) **(North Cascades)*:*** Hike along the east bank of Ross lake for a nice cool autumn (or spring) hike in the beautiful North Cascades National Park. (The route described here is 12.4 miles and 1,000 feet of elevation gain, and involves a water taxi and car shuttle.) NOTE: Ruby Creek Trailhead is not accessible until highway 20 opens, usually in April to mid May.

[**From WTA**](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/east-bank-ross-lake-737)**:** You'll enjoy moderate elevation gain and fabulous views on this lakeside trail that stretches more than 30 miles north -- nearly to Canada. From the Ruby Creek trailhead, it's a short descent to a bridge over Ruby Creek. Take time to note the history here -- this was the scene of a gold rush in the 1880s, and this spot was overrun with claims. Look around for signs of these activities, or interpretive plaques near the bridge.  Cross the bridge, and come to a junction with the Canyon Creek Trail. Here make a left to stay on the East Bank Trail. Continue on for 2.8 miles to a second trail junction. The trail here leads to Ross Lake and several campsites, which you will need permits for. Be sure to have your permit before you begin your hike. However, if you're not stopping here, stay on the main trail, which heads north, climbing moderately through Hidden Hand Pass. From Hidden Hand Pass, the trail leads downhill through dense forest, ultimately reaching the shores of Ross Lake. This allows for plenty of swimming, fishing, and camping opportunities, both on the way to, and along the shoreline.  16 miles in (only about halfway) the trail veers away from vivid-blue Ross Lake and follows Lightning Creek into a remote mountain valley.

* [**Thunder Creek**](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/thunder-creek) (**North Cascades):** Thunder Creek is an easy backpack of 13 miles RT with 600 feet of elevation gain. The trail follows Thunder Creek through old-growth forests, passing many gravel bars on the way to the junction with McAllister Creek.

[**From WTA**](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/thunder-creek-1)**:** Hike one of the deepest, wildest, and most accessible wilderness valleys in the North Cascades National Park Complex. Let Thunder Creek's incessant bellowing woo you into this primeval pocket. Enjoy scenic creekside resting posts perfect for whiling away the afternoon. Admire ancient cedars and towering firs and, from holes in the thick forest canopy, gaze out to jagged peaks cloaked in glacial ice. And while the surrounding high country is blanketed in white, enjoy this hike early or late in the season thanks to its low elevation.

* [**Black Canyon/Umtanum Ridge**](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/umtanum-ridge-black-canyon-loop) (**Yakima/Ellensburg area):** A moderate, 7 mile loop hike with 1,250 ft in elevation gain. The trail goes through a canyon of black basalt slopes up to a view point and then loops around Umtanum Ridge and back down the canyon.

[**From WTA**](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/umtanum-creek-canyon)**:** Begin with a walk over a bouncy suspension bridge above the trout-rich waters of the Yakima River. This trail meanders up an ever-narrowing canyon, but it also seems to be a path to the past. The trail leaves behind the highway and clusters of anglers and rolls up past an old homestead (complete with an overgrown, brambly apple orchard) and leads into pristine desert wildlife habitat. The year-round waters of Umtanum Creek draw a vast collection of critters to this canyon. Bighorn sheep roam the canyon walls and browse the grass-rich bottoms. Deer abound throughout the area. Coyotes hunt the heavy populations of rabbits, rock chucks (marmots), and upland birds (quail, pheasant, chukar, grouse, Hungarian partridge, and others). Rattlesnakes are frequently seen in the summer (another reason to visit in winter months) when they congregate to take advantage of the mice, voles, and ground squirrels that thrive in the creek-fed grasses and tree stands. Beavers and muskrats build homes in the creek, creating an endless series of pools and ponds throughout the length of the valley. All around, underfoot and on the canyon walls, desert wildflowers color the canyon.

* [**Ancient Lakes**](https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/routes-places/ancient-lake)(**Yakima/Ellensburg area):** Ancient Lake is an easy, 5 mile round trip desert hike with minimal elevation gain in eastern Washington. You'll hike through desert, past basalt walls, and around the lakes, at the end of which is a waterfall, enjoying wildflowers and interesting geology just to the east of the Columbia River near Vantage..

[**From WTA**](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/ancient-lakes)**:** View one of the best examples of a recessional-cataract canyon. The trail starts at the Ancient Lakes trailhead near the head of Potholes Coulee, where Ice Age (Missoula) floods hundreds of feet deep spilled westward out of the Quincy Basin into the Columbia Gorge below. The hike continues westward along the floods’ path all the way to the Columbia River – a total drop of 600 feet. From the TH, follow a mostly level trail past Judith Pool and a lovely waterfall after one mile, before descending across the cataract wall above the lakes. The trail levels off again as it passes by several of the Ancient Lakes.  This is the best place to set up an overnight camp. Along the way there are several side trails that lead to the top of a basalt blade that separates the dual-cataract canyon. One of the side trails (~2.5 miles from the river) leads to a geocache located in a notch at the top of the rock blade with an exceptional view looking down into both the Ancient Lakes and Dusty Lake basins. Once at the top of the cataract continue southeast across the eroded basalt plateau for about 0.8 miles to the flood-scoured Quincy Lakes before turning left onto an unpaved road back to the starting point. NOTE: While there is lots of lake water along route it is all irrigation runoff and probably not safe to drink - even after filtering. Plan to carry all the water needed for the duration of hike.