Lodges Tour Washington State and Oregon

August 24 – September 2, 2021

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In the past I had visited each of the three separate lodges we used on this tour, but never had I done a tour that included all three lodges, each with its own “personality”. On this inaugural Lodges Tour, we visited Lake Crescent Lodge which sits along the shore of the crystal clear Lake Crescent on the Olympic Peninsula. Quality time was spent at Paradise Inn at 6,000 feet on the south slope of snow-capped Mt. Rainier. And our final lodge destination found us marveling at Timberline Lodge, an architectural wonder on the slope of Mt. Hood. Though Mt. Hood was not as impressive as Mt. Rainier, Timberline Lodge was sure impressive displaying intricately engraved woodwork and wrought iron and so much more.

We started the Lodges Tour, a quasi birding tour, in Seattle and made an early morning departure for the Olympic Peninsula, passing the Tacoma Dome, safely crossing the Tacoma Narrows Bridge, and then finally crossing the floating Hood River Bridge leading us onto the actual Olympic Peninsula, home to Olympic National Park and scenic Hurricane Ridge where we watched a family of Sooty Grouse feed on vegetation within thirty feet of our group. A stop at Kitsap Memorial State Park yielded Common Loon, Belted Kingfisher, Stellar’s Jay, Brown Creeper, and the start of many Dark-eyed Junco sightings.

Our next three nights were spent at Lake Crescent Lodge, not one of the massive lodges built during the Great Depression, but a pleasant enough lodge nestled among giant Douglas Firs, Western Hemlock, and Western Red Cedar. Our two hikes, both starting at the front door of the lodge, took us through a lush temperate rainforest that we marveled at during our entire stay. Each morning we enjoyed Vaux’s Swift, Violet-green Swallows and Barn Swallows feeding over the lake, however, the highlight of our walks was the flock of nine or so Red Crossbills that were feeding on the ground each morning. Incredible! Or was the highlight the American Dippers along Barnes Creek? Or the Barred Owl that we eventually were able to view. One morning a few Common Mergansers were seen floating on the calm lake surface while an adult Bald Eagle perched serenely across the lake. The pleasant hike to Marymere Falls was wonderful as was the Moments in Time stroll, each with interpretive signs and massive trees. We did make a leisurely day trip to Sol Duc Hot Springs Resort for a stroll along the Ancient Grove Nature Trail where massive trees were covered in moss and nurse logs provided a foothold for newly growing trees. Nearby a few Coho Salmon were jumping and swimming upstream and Red Crossbills, Canada Jays and Stellar’s Jays were fun to watch as we ate our sack lunch under idyllic conditions.

After three wonderful nights along the shore of Lake Crescent we made our way toward Mt. Rainier and Paradise Inn with a picnic lunch stop at Smallwood Park where we had Wood Duck, California Quail, Belted Kingfisher, and the very dark race of Song Sparrow. Arriving at Paradise Inn is a remarkable experience with the lodge in the foreground and massive snow-capped Mt. Rainier providing the backdrop. Here we took some morning strolls around the lodge and a few further afield hikes like the Nisqually Vista Trail where we viewed a glacier, a silt filled mountain stream, Golden Eagle, Canada Jay, Stellar’s Jay, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Pacific Wren, Pine Siskin, and Orange-crowned Warbler.

On our way to Timberline Lodge in Oregon we located three Band-tailed Pigeons, more Canada Jays, and more Red Crossbills. A stop at the Mt. St. Helens Visitor Center provided, several Osprey, our only Red-breasted Sapsucker, California Scrub-Jay, Black-capped and Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Brown Creeper, and easy 1.25 mile stroll.

Timberline Lodge is an architectural wonder and the more one investigates the property the more one marvels at the courage and fortitude it took to build such an impressive structure with such little equipment, during such a difficult time in US history. A morning stroll behind the lodge gave us looks at Common Raven, Violet-green Swallow, Clark’s Nutcracker, Townsend’s Solitaire, and a lone Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch. A trip to the small town of Hood River and beyond included, stops at fruit stands, time sitting along the shore of the Columbia River watching parasailers, California and Glaucous-winged Gulls, a soaring Golden Eagle, American Goldfinch, and Brewer’s Blackbirds.

On our way to Portland for our last night we passed through the impressive Columbia River Gorge with a lunch stop at Multnomah Falls Lodge and Restaurant for a pleasant meal with Multnomah Falls a short hike away. After lunch we made the short stroll for a closer look at the falls along with Pacific Wren and two American Dippers that entertained us as we walked.

From reading this trip summary you might think this was another typical bird tour, but it was not, it was an experience. I know this was not a bird tour for several reasons, the most obvious reason being that, aside from the first morning, all breakfasts were at 8am followed by a little down time for exploration. Some folks wandered the trails individually or as a couple while others enjoyed reading the history of the particular lodge we were in at the time, and others sipped coffee while enjoying a lake or mountain view. I think Mt. Rainier provided the most spectacular view while others felt the pull of the lake. Another way I know this was not a full-fledged bird trip is we visited gift shops, various stores, and no sewage ponds looking for shorebirds.

On this trip the meals were a delight, almost the tour highlight. Breakfasts were sit down with plenty of quality food while dinner at the lodges was an experience unlike anything on a bird tour. Each lodge has a formal dining room, though jeans and a T-shirt worked well for us. In particular Timberline Lodge ensured dinner was a culinary experience, not just a meal. Reservations were needed for all meals, and each breakfast and dinner was a pleasurable dining experience.

Though the itinerary of the Lodges Tour is not built around bird hotspots and bird locations, we did carry our binoculars each day and did a bird list at dinner each evening. Well not really evening, we ate most dinners around 5:15pm and were done for the night after dinner. What helped to make this tour even more special is one couple celebrated their 42nd wedding anniversary during the tour, and of course this warranted a bottle of champagne and celebratory dessert. And a tour participant had summited 14,411foot Mt. Rainier in the 90s. We even had a first-time birder join our group and leave with a better appreciation of birds, birders, group travel, and nature.