



The Flyin' Solo VanLife on the Highways and Byways of North America

**RICK'S ROADS**

Ride Along and Enjoy the People, Places, and Who Knows What



BLOG POST: 2022.08.11  
Mount Rainier National Park, Washington



I woke up uninspired. Dunno why. I actually pondered spending the day in Wenatchee – spend the day in *Wenachee*?? -- but imminent heat chased me away. Mount Rainier National Park was firmly on the docket, but, incredibly, I wasn't feeling it. Not "feeling" a *National Park*? Are you on drugs? Well, no, maybe that was the problem. So, I gummied up (legal in Washington, if it matters to ya), hit the road in that direction and waited to see what would move me.

Well, Washington's diverse landscape totally moved me! Wenachee is on the edge of the central Washington desert. (Maybe you didn't know there was such a thing? There is, and it is big.) The first part of the ride headed northeast and up, briefly, into the forested hills.

Then the route turned south, and the next two hours were dominated by vast, blank, golden brown hills, brilliant sunshine, and **no** shade. The city of Yakima threw a population center into the otherwise lonely ride, and it kicked my heading to 2-7-0, due west. But that was just the halfway point. There was still a 100-mile ride to MRNP.





Don't get me wrong, now; I was digging the ride bigtime. The road was smooth and dry, the sunshine was invigorating, and the lack of traffic was wonderful. In the right mood, desert driving is amazing.

About an hour went by and it suddenly occurred to me that I was in forest country again. I guess I was paying attention to the tunes and did not catch the transition, but it must have happened fast. The road had been gaining elevation for more than hour, so I reckon I finally climbed out of the hot dry bowl and into the cool green hills.







When US-12 started hugging the northern shore of Rimrock Lake, I knew I had seen the last of desert country for the day.

Then the road hurled a huge surprise my way: Clear Creek Falls.

US-12 was curling higher up into the mountainous terrain, running tight up the side of a steep, steep slope, and the valley floor was looking farther and farther down. BluMaxx rounded a bend and – WOW! – a tall and elegant waterfall tumbled out of the forest on the other side of the valley and fell a good 228 feet straight down.

And it was made all the more dramatic being backstopped by the steep volcanic remains of Spiral Butte.

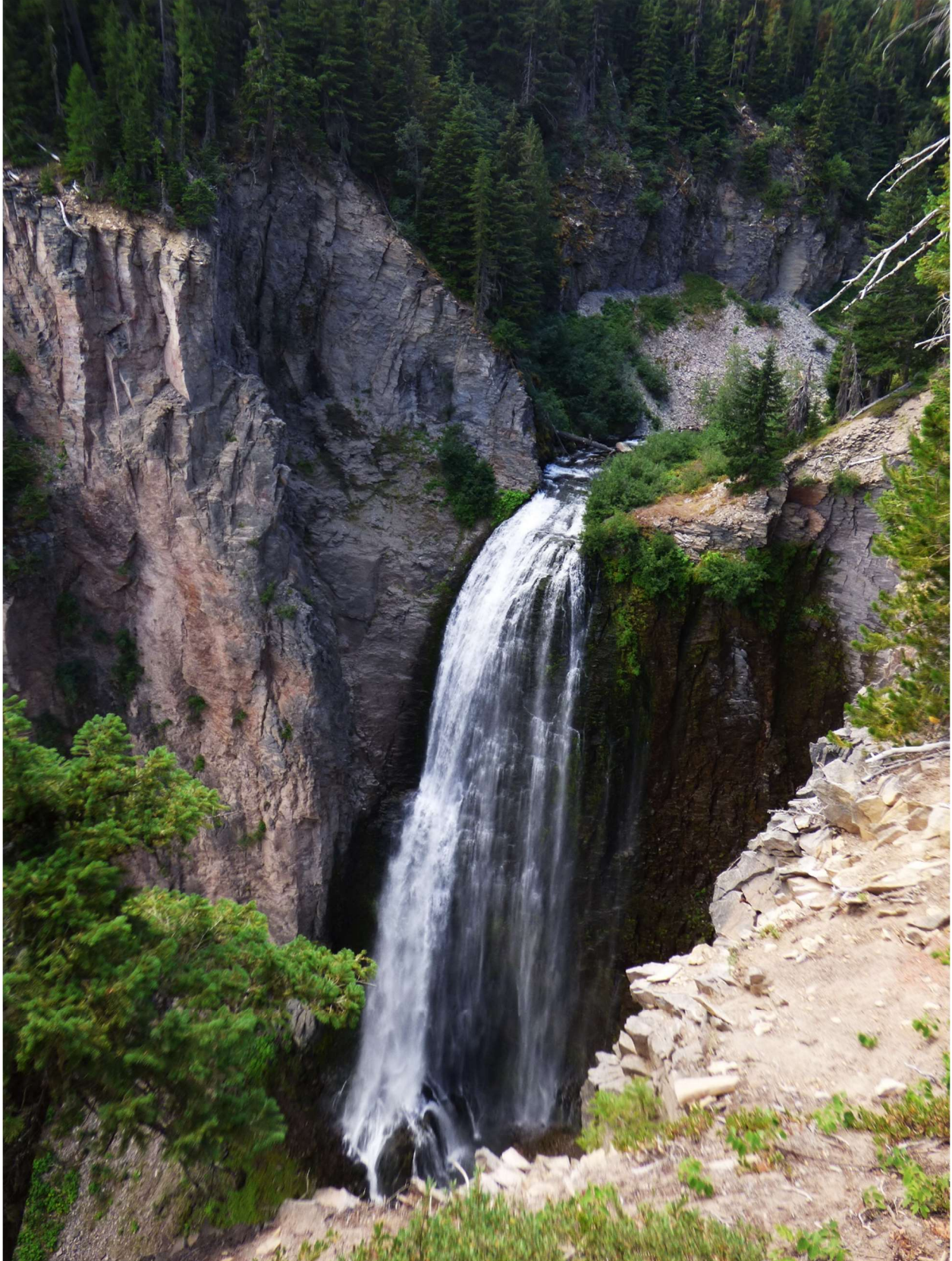
There was a turnout, but I was past it before I realized it was there. I saw the road ahead

was aiming that way, though, so drove on with eagerness. Desert Driving sure does whet your appetite for waterfalls.

I pulled into the next overlook and looked over. The views here were nowhere near as spectacular as I had hoped. I got a look at Clear Creek tumbling towards the brink, but the fall itself was almost completely out of view.

So, I wheeled Maxx back to the first turnout – about 1000 yards from the falls – got out my good Lumix zoom camera, and snapped some excellent photos from that distance. I got the full falls, plus a few extra-zoomed shots of the highlights of the long drop.







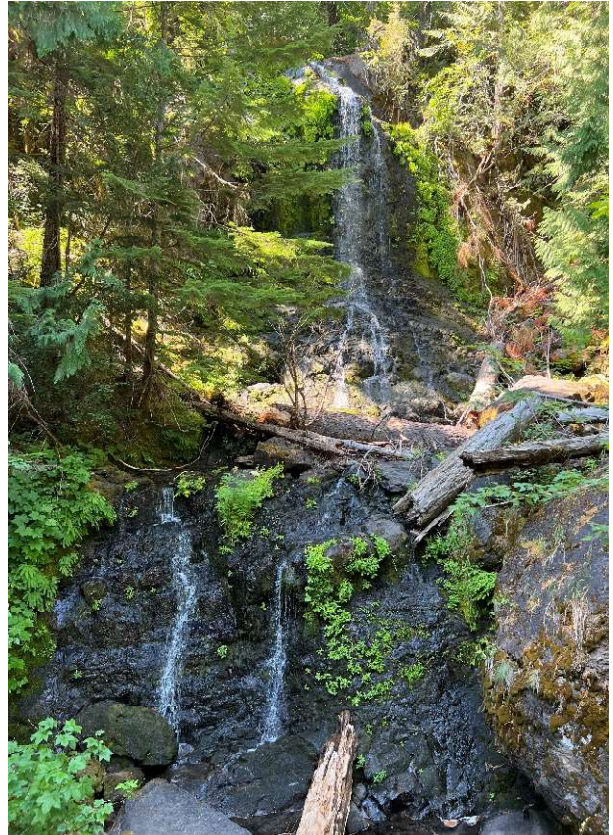






By now, my NP zeal had returned in full force. This beautiful waterfall was not even a State Park, let alone a *National* Park. How could I have begun this day with such torpor?

I love the simple South Gate of MRNP. It looks like it was made out of Lincoln Logs. And it was not long before I was grinning widely about the roadside cascades and long-range vistas that seemed to be everywhere.



This was going to be a No Hike Day. (The gummy was part of the reason.) So, I settled into BM's throne and got into fat-ass, dig-the-scenery mode.

Soon, there was a turnout area for a deep and narrow gorge with water gushing through it. I pulled over to snap some pics, but the depth kept the light out and the pics were just OK. BUT, across the road, I saw a landscape that me think I was in Austria.















OK, so all this, and I had seen glimpses of the mountain itself through gaps in the trees. That did not last long, though. The gaps grew more frequent and opened wider. Mount Rainier is not shy.





Clouds covered the summit. It is said of many large mountains that they create their own weather, and Rainier is certainly one that does. The huge hulk of rock blocks airflow, slows down banks of moisture as they try to squeeze around and by it, and makes the clouds pile up. Those intrepid souls who hike up the glaciers are sternly warned to be prepared for sudden changes in weather conditions.



The views got grander as I got closer, and very soon, I was parked at the Visitor Center in a place called Paradise, had my Timberlands on, and was ascending the Skyline Trail. Amount 15 minutes into it, it occurred to me that this was a No Hike Day, but, since yesterday was a Hike Day and I didn't hike, it all made sense.

I hiked, breathlessly, till there was more snow to deal with than I cared to deal with, and till the air started feeling a little too influenced by that big whitecap I had been focusing on for the last hour-plus. (In other words, it was getting freaking **cold**.)

On the ride up here, there had been some intense construction on some very precarious stretches of roadway. Infrastructure project, and all that. These were those side-of-the-mountain roads that I always marvel at, wondering how the heck they were ever built in the first place. Well, I was getting a taste of it. Even worse, though, they had to keep half the road open so all of us tourists could tour, so it was a real mess.















Rainier is not the only mountain around, of course. From its slopes, there were outstanding views of the Tatoosh Range and more.





I felt like I had hiked a long way. A few times, I had seen a certain landmark that seemed to be atop a ridge ahead and said, "OK, I'll go to that, then head back." They were always farther away than I expected, and they always opened up to a wide area where the trail continued on and on and up and up.

Deep inside, there was a bit of a goal being pursued. In 1990 – half-a-lifetime ago -- on the return leg of our Trans-Canada Trek, Ed, Bobby, and I had come to Seattle for the Goodwill Games. It was an international collection of athletic competitions that thumbed its nose at politics. In a juvenile display of nyeah-nyeah's, the USA had boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympics, so the Soviet Union had boycotted the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, shattering the dreams of countless athletes. The Goodwill Games – as the name implies – was an attempt to get these nations back on the same playing field.



We were enthusiastic Track & Field fans, and the chance to see a world class meet without the expense and hassle of the Olympics themselves was one damn good excuse for a 12,000 mile road trip. (We also went to a few Team Handball games. That sport is nuts.)

On a rest day in the meet schedule, we day-tripped down here to MRNP. It was a sunny day in Seattle, but by the time we got here, Rainer's clouds had piled up bigtime. The 80-degree urban day was about 60 at the park gate, and felt like the 40's when we pulled into Paradise. Light rain had started to fall. Rainer was indeed making its own weather today.

But, crazed by our addiction to running, we donned light nylon jackets and started jogging up the very path I was hiking on today. The trail had been empty, of course, except for some people even more demented than us who had their ski poles and parkas and were heading up to do the glacial thing.

The footing was muddy and the rocks were slick. We stumbled and slipped several times, but we soldiered on through the high-altitude air. The three of us made it as far as a distinctive point called Pebble Creek Junction. At that point, it had begun to snow. And not just flurries, mind you, this was wind-blown, stinging snow pellets. OK, maybe it was sleet. Whatever it was, it was cold and wet and biting.



Finally, the voice of reason prevailed when I blurted out, "Fuck this shit! I'm heading back!" Ed and Bobby saw wisdom in those words and joined me.

This was late JULY!!

Now, 34 years and a few weeks later, such squalls did not seem likely, though I did find myself standing in snow more than I liked. I wanted to get as far as Pebble Creek Junction, and I got fairly close,

but just didn't want it badly enough. I had stood in enough snow in my life, and my mind and body – now all gummied out – were craving the comfort of BM the PM and the fine scenery that lay ahead on the rest of the way through the park.







The ride out was indeed nice, though the waning of daylight dimmed what might have been several nice shots. One place I had to stop for a pic, though was Christine Falls, where the Van Tramp Creek tumbles out of the rocks and under the Paradise Road bridge. Beautiful little spot, even in semi-darkness.





I stopped for bite at the Trailhead Bar & Grill, a few miles beyond the park's west gate. My burger was overloaded (and, hence, messy), but tasty. The Country Boy IPA was also tasty, but, fortunately, not messy at all. \$23.99 including tip here: more than *two* brews and a burger cost me at Three Fingered Jacks, back in Winthrop. And the barkeep was a grumpy bitch. I won't be back. (Ha, no shit, right?)

There was still one problem, though: no sleep spot yet for tonight. The sun had gone down while I was in the TB&G, so I was facing some dark driving in deer country. I had my eyes peeled for some place to call my home for the night (besides, Blue Maxx, that is), but there was nothin' but a whole lot o' nothin' around. Roadside was starting to look like the way to go, but there were no turnouts and barely any shoulder on this narrow, dark, windy WA-7. I kept hoping some place would leap out at me.

And, yup, one leapt out. As I approached the tiny hamlet of Morton (population 1036), a couple of illuminated electric road signs warned of slow traffic ahead for 8/11-8/14. Heavy traffic? Here??

Well, as luck would have it, this was the weekend of the annual Loggers Jubilee, baby, and Morton was *buzzing*. I needed gas anyway, so as BM chugged his favorite beverage, I surveyed the scene.

Some type of event was making noise in the big lot across the street where all the tents were. It looked like the festivities were wrapping up for the night, though. The



lot beside the gas station had dozens of cars in it, and the one behind the station was filled with trailers and RVs. Now, *that* looked promising.

After gassing up, I tentatively tested out a couple of spots before finally settling into the back of the lot beside/behind the Chevron station. It was just a dirt lot, and there were no lights.

I felt good but not great about it -- especially after the whole lot emptied out within an hour. I even set things up inside to look like I had fallen asleep accidentally, in case the local lawmen came knock-knock-knockin'. They didn't, and I had me a free sleep.

Leaving in the morning, I looked back at where I was and pshaw'ed it. As inconspicuous as BluMaxx is, I should have had nary a concern.



Check out the full SmugMug photo album at:  
<https://rickmackenzie.smugmug.com/20220812-Mount-Rainier-National-Park-WA>