

Various Lakes: Nahatlatch, Ross, Chilliwack, Jones, Diablo, Myrtle

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Nahatlatch Lake

Drive 1 hour north of Hope and paddle 5-6 miles up the long lake with distant glacial mountain views. Camp on a sandbar a mile up the easy flowing river. This is the next watershed south of the Stein Valley Wilderness. The only development on the lake are a few drive in campgrounds. The drive up along the Class 3-4 river to the lake is terrific too. A good side trip on the way back is to walk down the old closed road to Hells Gate, watch the caldron boil, visit the excellent visitor center, and cable car back up.

Ross Lake Trip #1

After waiting out three weeks of rain, the weather cleared for the last three days of the season before the gate was closed to the most southern launch at the north end of Ross Lake. Upon verifying the lake level with the Ross Lake Resort (206-386-4437), I crossed the border at Sumas, turned south at Hope and carefully drove the badly potholed 50 mile dirt road arriving at the launch in about 3 hours. The gate that goes to the launch at the very end of the road is sometimes closed but not locked and the ranger said it's OK to launch and park, but not camp. Since it was late and the wind was still gusting I paddled only a short ways to Silver Tip campground with its spectacular view of the alpenglow on the toothy crag of Mt. Hozomeen.

The temperature dipped to 18 degrees that night and a thick layer of frost was on my sleeping bag in the morning. Mosquitoes were not a problem. The weather held calm and clear for the paddle down lake to the very lovely campground at Lighting Creek with fresh snow on all the surrounding mountains. Birch and vine maple leaves covering the ground and trees and glowed red and gold in the sunlight. After a warm nap in the hammock I climbed part way up Desolation Peak for a fine view of the lake and then paddled up lighting creek just as the sun flooded the keyhole canyon and saw fish swimming in clear emerald waters under floating golden fall leaves.

Shadows darkened the campsite at 2:30 this Halloween Eve and although I tried to read, the light show was far too distracting. It was dark and cold at 5:30. I tried out my recently purchased candle lantern and was surprised to find that I was able to read and write by the pool of light under its conical reflector. A true "white mans" fire followed a hot lentil soup dinner and occupied my gaze until 8:30 when I walked into the starlit darkness and collapsed into my inadequate 3 season bag covered with all my coats and sweaters. Moonlight woke me at 3 AM. I tried to read but the cold killed my batteries in minutes. Halloween's energy then tricked me into thinking scary thoughts of "lions and tigers and bears oh my" for hours!

I was very glad to see the sun the next morning burning away the mist and sparkling on the dozens of waterfalls cascading down the rocky avalanche slopes across the lake. Since the ranger was closing the gate at 5 PM, I wasted no time packing up and paddling back early as last year the wind came up suddenly and almost kept me shore bound for another night. The only boat I saw the entire three days was the ranger making his daily pass.

Ross Lake Trip #2

Cross the border at Sumas, drive to the first Hope exit, and follow the Skagit Valley's potholed road to Ross Lake's launch at Hozomeen Campground just south of the Canadian Border. Paddle six miles along the east bank to a lovely base camp under the golden leafed trees at Lightning Creek. My friend and I started at 9 AM from Bellingham and by the time we set up camp, it was dark. Short days and cold nights are the price to be paid for camping without bugs and paddling with few boats. Ross Lake is the only place I know of close to home that you can go for a multi day paddle with a view of old growth forest without logging scars.

Cross over to the West side the next morning and paddle down lake to a spectacular waterfall at Skymo Creek. Check the sky and consider crossing back so you won't be caught on the wrong side in a storm. Paddle further south and then up dark Devil's Creek. It's canyon is very narrow and steep to the point of being undercut in many places. We were able to paddle about a 1/2 mile in until we met a small logjam. Gold leaves floating on black water and it was very, very quiet.

You'll pass a number of other campgrounds along the way back, but none are close to being as nice as Lightning Creek with its cheery, golden leaf carpet and great sunset view of the Nohokameen Glacier. Nearby Lightning Creek is another short lovely paddle. If you go in the fall, bring a mushroom guide because around camp were dozens of huge tasty (a small bite chewed, not swallowed) mushrooms that might make a wonderful warm meal fried up with some butter and sherry on fire baked potatoes.

On the three times I've been there, I've paddled in following seas on the way back.

Chilliwack Lake

From the Sumas border crossing, take Route 1 East and follow signs for Chillewack Lake. After an hours drive on a good gravel road you'll come to the lovely 6 mile long Chilliwack Lake on the BC-US border. An easy two hour paddle past snow capped peaks with many waterfalls will take you to a sandy campspot at or just up the mouth of the river mouth in Sapper Park. From camp, you can hike through old growth forest along the Chilliwack River Trail or a number of old logging roads that turn into trails ascending the many nearby peaks. Other good sandy beach camp sites are along the lakes eastern shore at the foot of Paleface Mt. where their are great views of the sun's morning light on the opposite shore's snowfields and waterfalls on monolithic Mt. Lindeman.

Jones Lake

Greg and Linda Brown and I sat in the car in the BC Ferry ticket line at 9:30 AM Monday morning, July 20th., wondering what to do after being told that the Gulf Island Ferry we had planned to board was sold out. We were all packed for a nice overnight with no plan B. Thinking back to a brief visit I had made to Jones lake a few weeks before, I suggested we go there. Greg and Linda agreed and a few hours later we were paddling towards the magnificent Cheam Range at the end of 5 mile long Jones Lake southeast of Hope (not beyond).

Each point we rounded revealed more and closer views of the high alpine splendor at the end of the lake. Hopes of finding a nice sandy beach at the lakes mouth were met with the reality of marsh, mud, and bush. The wonderful views lightened our moods and our disappointment from being denied a place on the ferry disappeared. A short way back the east side of the lake we came upon first one and then another even better sandy beach; the second with a small cold creek running through it. These were about the only and certainly the best campsites on the lake.

On the first beach, the day being hot and the water cool and clean, we all quickly switched into our spa mode. I hammocked and snoozed in the shade for awhile and then, when G and L had moved on to our evening campsite, I did my usual hot sand to cold water routine three times and became one with some of the best forces this world has to offer; both my spirits and the granite sand sparkled brightly.

Later that evening, our campsite in the shade while Knight and Lady Peak still shown in the sun, we paddled back along the far end of the lake. I noticed mist rising from water and followed it back into the bush. My kayak turned cold as soon as I rounded the bend and came upon the glacial stream feeding the lake. The water was very cold and very clear. Above, Knight peak's rugged rimmed top held a chalice snowfield bathed in the last deep pink rays of sunlight . On our paddle back to camp, an Osprey dove out of the dark blue sky into the black water and circled the lake overhead.

Upon our return we noticed that the evening dew had damped our sleeping bags. They were quickly dried by the evening's campfire. Next time we'll wait until just before dark to make our beds. Later, in the middle of the night Linda watched the big dipper mirrored in the lake's still surface.

Morning was clear and bright. I rose early and made notes as I had my coffee. Before me, in the morning light, the Cheam Range revealed other sides I'd not yet seen. From virgin treed flanks, sharp toothed rock peaks thrust upwards. I gazed through my binoculars, marveling at the tenacity of the old trees growing smaller and smaller up the steep ridged rock. In a select few places, sacred groves perched precariously on ledges barely big enough for a few goats. On either side were avalanche slopes filled with waterfalls threading their wispy way downwards. Knight Peak's chalice shone in the new morning light.

We paddled back and drove to Hope for a picnic in the town's lovely park. Many large wooden sculptures of northwest animals and life lined the streets. In an hour and a half we were home.

Diablo Lake in Autumn

Drive 2 hours along Route 20 to the launch at Colonial Creek Campground. Paddle through a progressively narrowing, steep walled canyon. Waterfalls cascade onto water mirroring mossy banks profuse with ferns and highlighted by the last of autumn's gold. Warm colored leaves swirled on the surface briefly before they sunk into the cold dark deep. After about a hour and a half's paddle you'll reach Diablo Dam. The water flowing out would be an interesting place to practice paddling eddy lines.

Walk across an old wooden bridge and have lunch in the sun on some mossy rocks overlooking the canyon. The paddle back will take less time as you will be going with the slight current. The Hwy. 20 bridge is very high above you. A kayak club in Seattle does this trip in February when the canyon is draped with snow and icicles.

Myrtle Lake in Wells Gray Provincial Park

Drive 360 miles towards Jasper, BC and then portage 1.7 miles (rent a cart from the store in Blue River) along a good path to the launch.

Myrtle Lake has two main arms, the West being about 8 miles and the North 12 miles. We base camped at a beach on the East side that looked up both arms. The lake is restricted to self propelled boats and is very popular. Because we were there on Labor Day Weekend, there were reported to be about 50 canoes on the lake. There were 13 canoes and 4 kayaks at our site alone! Even so, the lake is in the middle of a remote wilderness park and there is plenty of quiet beauty for all.

Be careful you don't get stuck on the wrong side of the lake as we almost did and saw a few other people do and be sure to pitch your tents and tarps well as the wind can really blow. We decided not to paddle the our third day and enjoyed reading and watching the showers run down the West Arm. Through my binoculars, I watched a couple of canoes on the other side wait out the wind all day until a break finally came in the late afternoon.

There is also some lovely hiking in the area. We took a four hour hike through old growth cedar forest to a beautiful lake

For anyone considering this destination, do not rely on the small wheeled carts used for the Ferries. They are very hard to wheel over the rocky path. My boat tipped over 3 times. Large wheeled carts are available for rent for \$5 CD/ day in Blue River. Also, we all agreed that staying in Blue River overnight and getting a fresh start the next morning would allow more time to choose a campsite before dark. Finally, Myrtle Lake is a big lake with lots of side hikes . Plan to spend at least 5 days on the lake.